

**WHY DONEGAL SLEPT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF GAELIC GAMES IN  
DONEGAL, 1884-1934**

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## **Acknowledgements**

As a rather nervous schoolboy goalkeeper at the Ian Rush International soccer tournament in Wales in 1991, I was particularly aware of the fact that I came from a strong Gaelic football area and that there was only one other player from the south/south-west of the county in the Donegal under fourteen and under sixteen squads. In writing this thesis, I hope that I have, in some way, managed to explain the reasons for this cultural diversity. This thesis would not have been written without the assistance of my two supervisors, Professor Mike Cronin and Professor Matthew Taylor. Professor Cronin's assistance and knowledge has transformed the way I think about history, society and sport while Professor Taylor's expertise has also made me look at the writing of sports history and the development of society in a different way.

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## Abbreviations

<i>Ballyshannon Herald and North-Western Advertiser</i>	<i>BH and NWA</i>
<i>Derry Journal</i>	<i>DJ</i>
<i>Derry People and Donegal News</i>	<i>DP and DN</i>
<i>Derry People and Tír Conaill News</i>	<i>DP and TN</i>
<i>Derry Standard</i>	<i>DS</i>
<i>Donegal Democrat</i>	<i>DD</i>
<i>Donegal Independent</i>	<i>DI</i>
<i>Donegal People's Press</i>	<i>DPP</i>
<i>Donegal Vindicator</i>	<i>DV</i>
<i>Football and Sports Weekly</i>	<i>FSW</i>
<i>Gaelic Athlete</i>	<i>GA</i>
<i>Londonderry Sentinel</i>	<i>LS</i>
Public Records Office of Northern Ireland	PRONI

## **Abstract**

The development of sport in Donegal, a peripheral Irish county which was rather isolated from the more centralised areas of the British sporting 'revolution', has attracted only limited academic attention. This thesis will examine the origins and development of the GAA in Donegal between 1884 and 1934. The state of Donegal society in the late nineteenth century will be assessed and the factors which benefited, and hindered, the growth of codified sports there will be discussed. The reasons why the GAA failed to become established until the 1920s will be investigated and a comparison with provincial and national trends will be offered. The growth of clubs will be charted through an assessment of the areas in which Gaelic games were played. The rivalry between organisers of Gaelic football and soccer will be addressed and the impact of the press on this will also be explored. The reasons for the failure of hurling within the county will also be outlined. How the GAA became integrated into Donegal society will be examined through an investigation of the role of the players, administrators and patrons in the Association and the Donegal GAA's involvement in Ireland's fight for independence will be discussed. This thesis will make a valuable contribution to the historiography of the British sporting 'revolution' while adding to the increasing range of academic writing on the development of sport in regional Irish areas.

## Introduction

Writing in *The GAA: A People's History*, Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have stated that

the nineteenth century brought a revolution in sport that had its roots in the profound social and economic change which was transforming life in England. The industrial revolution turned England from an agricultural society into an urban one...between the schools and the industrial cities, patterns of play were remoulded. The informal, traditional recreations of previous generations were recast on an urban stage as modern, codified sports.<sup>1</sup>

These games 'became more commercialised as events involving amateur and professional competitors drew enormous crowds to purpose built stadiums across English cities, while many more played games in the parks and pavilions of the growing suburbs.'<sup>2</sup> In addition, Neil Tranter has claimed that 'the pace at which this occurred was wholly unprecedented' and 'sport in its modern, organised, commercialised and extensive form, was truly an "invention" of the Victorian and Edwardian age.'<sup>3</sup> How this sporting 'revolution' affected the development of sport at micro-level, in a peripheral Irish setting, has received only limited attention. Donegal, a rather isolated county lying in the north-west of Ireland, but at the time part of the United Kingdom and the British Empire, has thus far received little analysis. Many regions where sport developed into a major commercial enterprise in England and Scotland in the late nineteenth century had decisive factors which, as will be seen, were lacking or poorly developed in Donegal. Some areas of England can be defined as having a central role within the sporting 'revolution' and the development of modern sport. John Bale's study of areas linked with its growth has shown that professional football in Britain is 'strongly associated with the English industrial heartland, stretching from Merseyside-Lancashire to Greater London' with Central

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: A People's History* (Cork, 2009), pp 10-3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., For an alternative view of the sporting 'revolution' see Adrian Harvey, *The Beginnings of a Commercial Sporting Culture in Britain, 1793-1850* (Aldershot, 2004). Harvey argues that by the middle of the nineteenth century, sports events in Britain were more firmly established than has been accepted by many sports historians.

<sup>3</sup> Neil Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain, 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), pp 16-7.

Scotland also noted but being seen as less influential.<sup>4</sup> According to David Russell, 'Sheffield holds an absolute key role in the growth of association football' while 'the entire West Yorkshire textile district bounded by Tormorden in the west, Leeds and Wakefield in the east, Keighley in the north and the villages of the Holme and Colne valleys in the south, coupled with a substantial section of the Yorkshire coalfield east of Wakefield' was 'one of Victorian rugby's greatest strongholds and the absolute heartland of the game in the county.'<sup>5</sup> 'The widespread establishment of governing bodies to oversee the rules and organise and run competitions' was a feature of sport's development at a macro-level and in particular, 'it was in soccer that the development of competitive structures began earliest and proceeded furthest.'<sup>6</sup> Competitions such as the English FA Cup, first staged in 1871, the Scottish FA Cup (1873), the Welsh FA Cup (1877) and a number of national and regional leagues added greatly to the spread of interest in Association football in mainland Britain, while the latter years of the nineteenth century saw 'a veritable explosion of league and cup competitions for cricket clubs' in the Midlands and north of England.<sup>7</sup>

Tranter is, however, also careful to point out that the growth of sport in the late Victorian-Edwardian era was not a uniform development throughout Britain and that regional variations were commonplace. He highlights the case of East Northumberland and Stirling where 'institutional fragility' in a number of sports was caused mainly by financial problems.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, while at a macro-level there were clear patterns and trends in the rates at which sport developed, some regional areas experienced discontinuity and a failure to develop permanent structures for the spread of sport. According to David Russell, 'there is

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<sup>4</sup> John Bale, 'Sport and National Identity' in *British Journal of Sports History*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1986), pp 18-41, pp 32-4.

<sup>5</sup> David Russell, 'Sporadic and Curious': The Emergence of Rugby and Soccer Zones in Yorkshire and Lancashire, c. 1860-1914' in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol.5, no. 2, pp 185-205, p.190.

<sup>6</sup> Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society*, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp 24-6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 15.



often a tendency to talk in generalizations, to speak of certain sports as ‘national’ or concentrated in the ‘north’ or ‘industrial regions.’<sup>9</sup> Certainly, more work needs to be undertaken on areas which have received less attention within mainland Britain. As Martin Johnes has stated, ‘the geographic balance of local case studies has not been even and little has been said about London, much of Scotland or the south of England...other regional identities, such as those in the Midlands, East Anglia and north Wales, could be profitably mined if we are to understand what extent there were national cultures in either Britain or its constituent nations.’<sup>10</sup> Therefore Neil Tranter’s assertion, made in 1998, that ‘beneath the level of the grand and the famous there is a history of the more mundane and obscure still waiting to be satisfactorily uncovered’ still rings true.<sup>11</sup>

The case of County Donegal provides a clear example of how sport functioned at a micro-level in a peripheral Irish county and how events in parts of late nineteenth century Britain which saw a transformation in levels of codification and institutionalisation of leagues and cups and the development of professional structures, with the mass support they drew, failed to have a serious effect on the county’s sporting infrastructure. By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, Donegal’s competitive sporting calendar was still relatively empty and the majority of its sporting teams remained confined to friendly matches. Team sports by 1920 were limited to Gaelic games and soccer and even then, not every village or town could boast of these clubs and many villages had none, with local enthusiasm and patronage usually the determining factor in a club’s existence. Competitive sport generally remained localised and attempts to bring in or unite a wider sporting community throughout the county were generally unsustainable. At times links with sporting

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<sup>9</sup> Russell, ‘Sporadic and Curious’, p. 185.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Johnes, ‘Historiography of Sport in Modern Britain’ pp 1-21, p. 8. Retrieved from [http://www.academia.edu/197884/Historiography\\_of\\_Sport\\_in\\_Britain](http://www.academia.edu/197884/Historiography_of_Sport_in_Britain) [Accessed 27 Oct. 2012].

<sup>11</sup> Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society*, p. 96.

bodies in bordering counties were more prominent.<sup>12</sup> Most of Donegal's soccer and GAA clubs did not own their own grounds and the county lacked a centralised sports arena for Gaelic games or association football. Cricket attracted little interest at this stage and regattas and annual athletic competitions similarly seem to have declined.

This thesis is the first comprehensive study of the initial fifty years of the GAA's development in County Donegal. As will be seen, Donegal was a peripheral area which was not affected by the sporting 'revolution' to the same extent as some parts of England and the growth of sport in the county took place at much slower rates of development. However this does not mean that sport was not able to develop there. It will illustrate the incompleteness of the Irish sporting 'revolution' and how the growth of sport in Donegal relied mainly on local individuals' enthusiasm rather than any national, or even provincial, administrative agencies. Of particular importance in the decision to undertake an examination of the GAA in Donegal is the diversity of the county, socially, culturally and physically which means that it differed from a number of other Irish counties and lacked a particular unity for the administration of sport to work effectively throughout its area. Donegal was a society in transition towards the end of the nineteenth century but its mainly agricultural structure meant that many of the factors which affected the development of sport in Britain during the latter half of that century were lacking or poorly developed. How the growth of sport in Donegal contrasted with wider developments will be examined in this thesis, as despite these differences, by 1934 there were at least sixty-seven Gaelic football teams in operation and at least 103 soccer teams.<sup>13</sup> Zones where these codes were most popular were clearly evident. Competitive structures were in place for both Gaelic football and hurling at various levels and public support, although varying throughout the county, was sufficient to give the GAA a firm footing within society.

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<sup>12</sup>See, for example, *Derry People and Donegal News*, 18 Oct. 1902.

<sup>13</sup>See appendices 2 and 11.

In this way, much progress had been made since the 1880s. An attempt will be made to examine the role of Gaelic Games, and the officials, players, supporters and patrons of the GAA in Donegal society. The reasons for the slow development of the GAA there between 1884 and 1934 will be given, and its growth in relation to the wider British sporting ‘revolution’ will be examined. Why GAA clubs developed in certain areas as opposed to others within the county will also be identified. Finally, it is intended to locate the study of sport in Donegal within a wider context of sports history and Irish social, economic, cultural and political history. Within these four main aims, a number of other fundamental questions must be answered. For example, who was behind the re-founding of the GAA in Donegal in 1919 and what was the effect of the War of Independence and the Civil War on its progress? Did the playing of soccer really decline because of anti-British sentiment at this time or was this deterioration already happening? What was the impact of the Ban and other measures against ‘foreign’ games and did these help or hinder the GAA? Who were the players, administrators and patrons of the Association? How did interest in the GAA improve in the 1920s and what was its place in the social life of the county? How did these developments fit into the GAA at a national level? How much did association football curtail this development in Donegal?

This thesis will add to the historiography and understanding of sports history in Ireland and Britain and to the historiography of Donegal. The lack of research undertaken on the GAA in Donegal is of particular significance here. A comparison with other patterns of sporting development both in Ireland and Britain is therefore necessary. The previous decade has seen an increase in the volume of work on sport in Ireland undertaken at doctoral level, reflecting the growing acceptance of sport as a topic for study at university level in Ireland. The publication of Tom Hunt’s groundbreaking doctoral examination of sport in Westmeath (2007), which set the standard for the study of local sport in Ireland, has been followed by

Liam O'Callaghan's work on rugby in Munster and further works undertaken by Dónal McAnallen and Richard McElligott.<sup>14</sup> Lengthy examinations of the GAA in Dublin and cricket in County Tipperary have also added greatly to our understanding of sport at county level and illustrate the importance of empirical research in studies of this type.<sup>15</sup>

Although research of sporting patterns throughout Ireland is therefore still in its infancy, two counties in particular, which both received significant academic attention at doctoral level, were chosen for the purpose of providing a comparison with Donegal. A number of aspects of the development of the GAA in Donegal will therefore be contrasted with that of another peripheral county, Kerry, located in the south-west of Ireland and with a similar geographical structure, an emphasis on agriculture and also a lack of major industries, and in many ways similar to Donegal in its rural location. A comparison of sporting activity with that in Westmeath will also be given. Westmeath, lying in the centre of Ireland, was 'a very untypical county' which had good transport links with Dublin while the Land War had little effect there. It was also politically stable and prosperous in the late nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> The development of the GAA in Donegal will also be compared with the growth of sport in parts of England and Scotland with particular emphasis being placed on developments in East Northumberland, Yorkshire, Lancashire and Stirling.

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<sup>14</sup>See Tom Hunt, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath* (Cork, 2007); Liam O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster: A Social and Cultural History* (Cork, 2011); Dónal McAnallen, 'Playing on the Fourth Green State: The Gaelic Athletic Association and the Northern Ireland State, 1921-1968', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway, 2010; Richard McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom: the Establishment and Development of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Kerry, 1884-1924', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University College Dublin, 2011.

<sup>15</sup>See William Nolan (ed.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin, 1884-2000* (Dublin, 2005) and Patrick Bracken, 'Foreign and Fantastic Field Sports': *Cricket in County Tipperary* (Thurles, 2004).

<sup>16</sup>Neal Garnham, 'A Sporting Challenge' review of Tom Hunt, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath*, pp 1-2, p.2. Retrieved from [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/riiss/Reviews/Garnham\\_A%20sporting%20challenge.pdf](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/riiss/Reviews/Garnham_A%20sporting%20challenge.pdf) [Accessed 8 Dec. 2011].

## Historiography of the GAA

The majority of Irish historians have, until the last decade, largely ignored sport in their assessments of how the country developed. Gaelic games have received some attention, although generally only the political aspects of the GAA have been deemed worthy of attention.<sup>17</sup> As Richard McElligott has stated, a recent exception to this is Diarmaid Ferriter's 2004 publication *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2004*.<sup>18</sup> Ferriter's assertion that 'in truth the evolution of the GAA was not a narrow pursuit in sporting Anglo-phobia but Irish sport embracing the British model of sport codification and mirroring the European, African and Asian trend of ball games becoming an important part of the social fabric' is a more suitable reflection of trends of development within the GAA.<sup>19</sup> In looking at the foundation and the myths surrounding the establishment of this Association, Paul Rouse has argued that 'when you address the founding of the GAA, it is clear that politics mattered and mattered a lot, but so did much else.'<sup>20</sup> Specialist works on the GAA also tended to focus on these political links. Early histories by T.F. O'Sullivan (1916), P.J. Devlin (1934) and P.D. Mehigan, who, under the pen-name 'Carbery', in the early 1940s wrote a number of histories of Gaelic football and hurling, have stressed its political nationalist links and the mythical origins of Gaelic games.<sup>21</sup> Later twentieth century works by Marcus de Burca and W.F. Mandle also focused mainly on the nationalist and political aspects of the GAA.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>See, for example, Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London, 1988) and J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>18</sup>McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom', p.1. See Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London, 2004). I am grateful to Richard for granting me access to his own work.

<sup>19</sup>Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, p.101. See also R.V. Comerford, *Ireland: Inventing the Nation* (London, 2003) for an examination of the growth of sport in Ireland.

<sup>20</sup>Paul Rouse, 'Why the GAA was founded' in Dónal McAnallen, David Hassan and Roddy Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA: Ulaidh, Éire agus eile* (Armagh, 2009), pp 79-85, p.85.

<sup>21</sup>See T.F. O'Sullivan, *The Story of the GAA* (Dublin, 1916); P.J. Devlin, *Our Native Games* (Dublin, 1935); P.D. Mehigan, *Gaelic Football* (Dublin, 1941) and *Hurling: Ireland's National Game* (Dublin, 1942).

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Marcus De Burca, *The GAA: A History* [Second edition] (Dublin, 2000) and W.F. Mandle, *The Gaelic Athletic Association and Irish Nationalist Politics* (London, 1987).

Until recently, an overemphasis by historians on the role played by the Irish Republican Brotherhood and ‘the Ban’ overshadowed many of the sporting and other social activities which took place.<sup>23</sup> As late as 1998, Mike Cronin was able to correctly state that the involvement of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in the early GAA has been a key theme in the writing of GAA history in his analysis of these works.<sup>24</sup> Cronin believes Mandle has been particularly guilty of focusing too heavily on links between the IRB and the Association and failed to give significant attention to how the development of the GAA was affected by wider sporting trends.<sup>25</sup> More recent work, particularly in the last decade, by Cronin and Rouse and a number of other academics has done much to place the organisation in the context of the sporting ‘revolution.’ In assessing the Association’s contribution to Irish society and its people, these publications have done much to shed new light on the role of the GAA.<sup>26</sup> As Tom Hunt has noted, ‘recent works of scholarship on the GAA and Gaelic games have tended to comprise a multi-author, thematic approach to wide-ranging aspects of the Association’s activities.’<sup>27</sup> Therefore an alternative, less political version of early events within the Association is now being established.

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<sup>23</sup> For an assessment of the origins of the Irish Republican Brotherhood see Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* [Second edition] (Dublin, 2005), pp 67-8. Founded in 1858, the IRB was a secret oath bound society which advocated the removal of British rule in Ireland by militaristic means. For an explanation of the Ban see Mike Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic games, Soccer and Irish Identity Since 1884* (Dublin, 1999), p. 84. By the end of February 1905, three significant bans had been introduced by the GAA. Under the first of these, introduced in 1885, athletes who participated in non-GAA events were prohibited from taking part in GAA competitions. Two years later, members of the Royal Irish Constabulary were excluded from membership. Although both of those lasted only briefly, early in 1905 a new ban was implemented which stated that those who participated in ‘rugby, soccer, hockey, cricket or any imported games shall be suspended for two years from date of playing such games, and this rule to take effect from 1 February 1905.’ Members of the police and army were also denied membership of the GAA under this ban.

<sup>24</sup> Mike Cronin, ‘Fighting for Ireland, Playing for England? The Nationalist History of the Gaelic Athletic Association and the English Influence on Irish Sport’ in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 15, no. 3 (1988), pp 36-56, p.36.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>26</sup> See for example McAnallen, Hassan and Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA*; Mike Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse (eds.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884-2009* (Dublin, 2009); Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People’s History* and *The GAA: County by County* (Cork, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Tom Hunt, ‘Parish factions, parading bands and sumptuous repasts: the diverse origins and activities of early GAA clubs’ in McAnallen, Hassan and Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA*, pp 86-99, p.86.

In illustrating the way the GAA develops in Donegal, this thesis challenges the macro-argument of Mandle that the early GAA was an overtly political organisation and shows that national politics were not at the root of the growth of the GAA in Donegal. As will be seen, his statement that ‘until 1905 the GAA was principally a nationalist, indeed an extreme nationalist, organisation that played its games and ran its meetings largely as a nationalist exercise’ cannot be applied to Donegal.<sup>28</sup> There, it was a slow development and a much more mundane one at this localised level than has been acknowledged throughout the GAA’s historiography. When the Association did finally become established in Donegal in the 1920s, it was more to do with the enthusiasm of individuals and an absence of an existing consistent structure for team sports for young men than any strong political identity amongst them. The power of agency in the spread of sport is shown as the GAA in Donegal relied primarily on individuals’ enthusiasm.

Academic work on the history of Donegal, with the exception of a handful of articles and recent publications, has neglected the place of sport within Donegal society.<sup>29</sup> The most significant evidence of pre-codified hurling in Donegal lies in a number of interviews recorded by Seán Ó hEochaidh in 1943 and stored in the archives of the Folklore Commission at UCD.<sup>30</sup> This information had been gathered throughout the country as part of a government project around this time. Written in Irish, Liam P. Ó Caithnia’s *Scéal na hIomana (The Story of Hurling)* traces the origins of hurling from ancient times until the GAA was established and, in addition to Art Ó Maolfabhail’s *Camán: 2,000 Years of Hurling in Ireland: An Attempt to Trace the History and Development of the Stick-and-Ball Game in*

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<sup>28</sup>W.F. Mandle, ‘Sport as Politics: the Gaelic Athletic Association 1884-1916’ in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds.), *Sport as History* (St Lucia, 1979) pp 99-123, p.108.

<sup>29</sup>See, for example, William Nolan, Liam Ronayne and Mairead Dunlevy(eds.), *Donegal History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1995) and Jim MacLaughlin(ed.), *Donegal: The Making of a Northern County* (Dublin, 2007) For GAA see P.S. Mac a Ghoill, ‘100 years of the GAA in Donegal’ in the *Donegal Annual*, 1984, no. 36 (Ballyshannon, 1984), pp 89-94; Very Reverend Liam McCaul, ‘From Thurles to Ardara, 1884-1921’ in the *Donegal Annual*, 1985, no. 37(Ballyshannon, 1985), pp 67-73; Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: County by County*, pp 105-117.

<sup>30</sup>Liam P. Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomana* (Dublin, 1980), pp 772-9.

*Ireland During the Past 2,000 Years*, gives the most comprehensive overview of accounts stored in these archives.<sup>31</sup> Donegal GAA historian Pádraig S. Mac a' Ghoill wrote a number of articles on early forms of hurling and handball in Donegal while in 2004 an account of handball in Donegal was published by Pat Holland.<sup>32</sup> While Ó Caithnia has also looked at the development of forms of football in his 1984 publication *Báirí Cos in Éirinn: Roimh Bhunú na gCumann Eagraithe* (Football in Ireland: before the foundation of organised associations), this is a much shorter account than his extensive hurling publication and contains little mention of football being played in Donegal.<sup>33</sup> Research on the GAA in Donegal therefore merits a more thorough investigation.

Very little has been written about the early days of the GAA in County Donegal, either academically or at a popular local level. An exception to this would be Cronin, Duncan and Rouse's 2011 publication *The GAA: County by County*, although this is based mainly on secondary sources.<sup>34</sup> While it is true that there are few remaining records from the majority of the first GAA clubs in the county, a general failure to investigate the surviving archives has meant that only a handful of articles have been published on the period prior to 1905 in Donegal. Like in Westmeath, Cusack's 'prairie fire' of the mid-1880s had little impact on Donegal, and the GAA remained a minority organisation in this north-west county until the 1920s.<sup>35</sup> This thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of the reasons for this delay, why Donegal's earliest GAA clubs and teams were founded, the evidence for their lack of political involvement and an examination of the frequency of their matches. It proves that the Parnell Split had little direct influence on their decline and that they relied heavily on clubs in Derry

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<sup>31</sup> Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomana* and Art Ó Maolfabhail, *Camán: 2,000 Years of Hurling in Ireland: An Attempt to Trace the History and Development of the Stick-and-Ball Game in Ireland During the Past 2,000 Years* (Dundalk, 1973).

<sup>32</sup> See Pádraig S. Mac a' Ghoill 'Cross-country Hurling in Ardara' in *CLCG Ard a' Ratha* (Ardara, 1980), pp 53-7 and '100 years of the GAA in Donegal' in *the Donegal Annual, 1984*, no. 36, pp 89-94 and Pat Holland, *100 years of Handball: Handball, Donegal and the World* (Ballybofey, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Liam P. Ó Caithnia, *Báirí Cos in Éirinn: Roimh Bhunú na gCumann Eagraithe* (Dublin, 1984).

<sup>34</sup> Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: County by County*, pp 105-8.

<sup>35</sup> Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.141.



for instruction and activity. This examination of activity is necessary as a small number of academics and GAA writers have acknowledged the existence of some of Donegal's early clubs but without any in-depth investigation of their activities or why they went into decline.<sup>36</sup> One writer acknowledges the presence of four clubs between 1888 and 1891 but a failure to look at newspaper sources, which would have revealed more, is evident.<sup>37</sup> Seán Ó Caiside's account of the growth of the GAA in Donegal, published in 1934 in *The Irish Press GAA Golden Jubilee Supplement*, mentioned the remoteness of the county and the presence of the Royal Irish Constabulary but was otherwise vague in explaining why the GAA was slow to develop there.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, a booklet printed in 1997 to commemorate the founding of the GAA in Donegal and an article written in the *Donegal Annual* in 1985 left the impression that the activities of the original GAA clubs were something of an enigma and that 1905 was the beginning of the GAA in Donegal.<sup>39</sup> Added to this, the reasons for the failure of the first Donegal GAA county board between 1905 and 1907 have not been adequately dealt with. The work of 'Carbery' has offered little on the early GAA in Donegal and, while briefly addressing the 1905 county board, he makes the assertion that this development continued 'with tenacious earnestness' while failing to recognise its subsequent decline.<sup>40</sup> One GAA writer in the local press accurately claimed in 1931 that 'owing to lack of support the games died' but a more thorough investigation of this is needed if one is to understand why this

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<sup>36</sup>See for example, Mehigan, *Hurling: Ireland's National Game*, p. 95; Leo Deery and Danny O'Kane (eds.) *Doire: A History of the GAA in Derry 1884-1984* (Coleraine, 1984), pp 9-16 and Eoghan Corry, *Oakboys: Derry's Football Dream Comes Through* (Dublin, 1993), pp 52-4; Cronin, Duncan and Rouse *The GAA: County by County*, pp 105-8 and Art Ó Maolfabhail, Roddy Hegarty and Dónal McAnallen 'From Cú Chulainn to Cusack: Ball-playing, Camán, Shinny and Hurling in Ulster before the GAA' in McAnallen, Hassan and Hegarty *The Evolution of the GAA*, pp 62-78.

<sup>37</sup>Mac a Ghoill, '100 years of the GAA in Donegal', p. 89. This account of the early clubs is based solely on RIC reports.

<sup>38</sup>Seán Ó Caiside, 'It was the Gaelic Leaguers who rallied Donegal' in *The Irish Press GAA Golden Jubilee Supplement 1934*, p. 40.

<sup>39</sup>See McCaul, 'From Thurles to Ardara, 1884-1921' and Eamon Monaghan, *Remembering our Founders* (Donegal, 1997).

<sup>40</sup>See Mehigan, *Gaelic Football*, p.100.

initial effort did not receive sufficient support to continue after a promising start.<sup>41</sup> This thesis provides the reasons why this board declined after a relatively short existence. A small number of Donegal's clubs have published interesting accounts of their involvement in the early GAA, based mainly on oral and newspaper sources.<sup>42</sup> While all noteworthy, these were written mainly in isolation from national and international sporting trends and shed scarce light on how their development fitted into, or were influenced, by these macro developments.

Some club historians have dwelt heavily on anti-British feeling after the 1916 Rising in accounting for the growth of clubs in the county.<sup>43</sup> Apparently at this time 'clubs really started to spring up all over the county in a big way.'<sup>44</sup> As will be seen, the GAA's progress in Donegal was due to a more complex set of factors, and the effects of the Irish Revolution on the GAA in Donegal were not as clear cut as presumed. As a result, development of clubs and competitions progressed at a much slower rate. The number of GAA clubs which existed in each divisional area of the county in the period between 1919 and 1934 is analysed and a clearer interpretation of clubs' growth and decline is given. The geography of GAA clubs in Ireland has received little attention, although an exception would be Paul Rouse's study of hurling and Gaelic football teams in County Offaly.<sup>45</sup> Although in Offaly, 'both codes had a presence throughout the county', the development of hurling, while boosted by patronage and

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<sup>41</sup>*Donegal People's Press* [Hereafter referred to as *DPP*], 2 May 1931.

<sup>42</sup>See Donal Campbell, Damian Dowds and Damian Mullan (eds.), *Against the Grain: A History of Burt, its People and the GAA* (Burt, 2000), Seán Mac Conaill (ed.), *Idir Peil agus Pobal: A History of the GAA in the Parish of Ardara 1921-2003* (Ardara, 2004), Michéal Ó Domhnaill (ed.), *CLG Cill Chartha 1924-1884* (Donegal, 1984) and Joe Crawford and Dan McCool, *Golden Memories: A History of Gaelic Games around the Twin Towns 1916-1966* (Ballybofey, 1999).

<sup>43</sup>See Crawford and McCool (eds.) *Golden Memories*, pp 2-4 and Seán Boyle, 'History of the GAA in Letterkenny and St Eunan's club' in Seán Ó Baoill (ed.), *Donegal GAA Yearbook* (Ballyshannon, 1982), pp 89-90.

<sup>44</sup>Boyle, 'History of the GAA in Letterkenny', p.89.

<sup>45</sup>Paul Rouse, 'Sport and the Offaly tradition: The Gaelic Athletic Association' in William Nolan and Timothy P. O' Neill (eds.) *Offaly History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1998), pp 889-928, pp 895-6. In looking at the location of county championship winning hurling and Gaelic football clubs there, he has noted the success of hurling clubs around the Birr area in the south-west, while Gaelic football county championship final victories have been mainly achieved by teams in the north of the county.

a tradition of iomáin in the south, was limited in the north by ‘the blanket of bog and its closer proximity to the anglicised pale.’<sup>46</sup>

This thesis will explore the development of the GAA in Donegal and its clubs and competitions in greater detail than my 2007 Masters thesis, ‘The Social Importance of Gaelic Games and Association football, 1884 to 1914’ and a much more comprehensive analysis of the rivalry between Gaelic football and soccer in the county is given.<sup>47</sup> This work will also cover a longer timespan, incorporating the first fifty years of the GAA from 1884 to 1934 as opposed to 1884 to 1914 in the above work. This is important as the GAA in Donegal did not begin to develop until the 1920s and did not become firmly established until the following decade. It also allows for an assessment of the GAA in Donegal’s role in Ireland’s struggle for independence and for an examination of why the GAA failed to spread throughout the county. While primary sources used in the above thesis consisted only of three local newspapers, a number of RIC reports and some church records, this examination of the GAA will use a much wider range of archival sources. More recent publications and doctoral work undertaken on the GAA and sport in Ireland also mean that a greater range of sources have been incorporated into this assessment. In addition, this thesis has benefited particularly from the supervision of those specialising in the history of sport. Particular attention will also be given to sporting trends throughout Britain and Ireland so that a broader assessment of how the GAA developed will be offered.

While admittedly, newspaper reports on sporting activity in some rather isolated areas such as West Donegal are lacking, the local press forms the source for the majority of data gathered, as existing club records are scarce and enquiries about the existence of these bore

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<sup>46</sup>Rouse, ‘Sport and the Offaly tradition’, pp 894-5.

<sup>47</sup>Conor Curran, ‘The Social Importance of Gaelic Games and Association Football, 1884-1914’, M.A. thesis, St Patrick’s College, Dublin 2007. This thesis was published in 2010 as *Sport in Donegal: A History* (Dublin, 2010).

little fruit.<sup>48</sup> Local newspapers such as the *Derry Journal*, *Donegal Democrat*, *Derry People* and *Donegal News*, *Derry People and Tír Conaill News*, *Derry Standard*, *Londonderry Sentinel*, *Ballyshannon Herald and North-west Advertiser*, *Donegal Vindicator* and *Donegal Independent* have been used to examine developments at local level.<sup>49</sup> Nationally, Dublin based newspapers *Sport*, *Gaelic Athlete*, *The Irish Press* and *The Irish Times* have, to a much lesser extent, provided information on the GAA in Donegal, but were central in understanding national trends.

Reports of the Royal Irish Constabulary focused on the state of affairs in a county using a number of headings such as the general state of the county; any particular portion of the county which may have been in a more disturbed state than the rest; increase or decrease in outrages; any serious outrage; evictions and landlord tenant relationships; boycotting and intimidation; National organisations; any special measures undertaken for patrolling; increase or decrease in protection. Evictions and boycotted farms and suggestions or points of interest were also covered, although after 1921, of course, reports ceased to exist. This source is important as, although it does not provide a comprehensive account of the early GAA clubs and information was generally gathered only to monitor Irish Republican Brotherhood involvement, these records do provide the only existing record of a number of clubs' political affiliations, membership figures and personnel in Donegal between 1888 and 1892.

Although this is not the first academic study of the GAA in Donegal, it is also unique in that it uses a larger range of empirical data collected from these newspapers and previously unused archives than a previous work undertaken at Masters level by Derek

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<sup>48</sup> Appeals in articles published in the local press seeking information on clubs brought no results. Similarly an enquiry into the whereabouts of material used in an exhibition, held in the County Museum at Letterkenny to mark the ninetieth anniversary of the founding of the first county board, brought a poor response.

<sup>49</sup> The *Derry People and Donegal News* became known as *Derry People and Tír Conaill News* on 21 March 1925.

Doherty in 1998, although the period covered in that thesis is somewhat longer.<sup>50</sup> Doherty's work relied heavily on sources such as club histories and previously published articles, and followed earlier trends in the writing of GAA history by drawing parallels with the GAA and national political evolution, through a reliance on police reports and a lack of investigation of newspaper and administrative sporting archives. Like a number of GAA writers within the county, he has also failed to look at the early GAA in Donegal or assess properly why the first county board ended in failure. Added to this, Doherty presumes that the 1920s were a decade in which the organisation of the GAA in the county went smoothly after national changes in the administration of the government.<sup>51</sup>

This thesis assesses the development of the GAA in Donegal, using, at provincial level, the Ulster GAA Council Minutes at Armagh and nationally, the GAA Central Council minutes at Croke Park. Although no records exist prior to 1927 in the Donegal GAA Archive at Lifford, a series of letters dating from the late 1920s and early 1930s kept by former county board chairman Seán Ó Caiside provide an interesting account of the difficulties faced by those organising the GAA in the county and their attempts to deal with these. Therefore a more thorough assessment of administrative attempts, at local, provincial and national level, to develop the GAA in the county can now be given.

The GAA in Donegal did not develop in isolation from other sports. Cricket, rugby, regattas, horse racing and athletics were all being organised in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, but were generally seen as minority sports by the early part of the twentieth century and continued to have only minor roles within Donegal society for the rest of the period covered here. In exploring their early development this thesis differs from many GAA histories which focus only on the development of hurling and Gaelic football. Access

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<sup>50</sup>Derek Doherty, 'The History of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Donegal', unpublished M.A. thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 1998.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp 52-3.

to the newly opened Football Association of Ireland Archive at University College, Dublin, has meant that the rivalry between GAA and soccer organisers can be viewed from the perspectives of these governing bodies while the attitude of the Irish Football Association towards the development of soccer and Gaelic games can be assessed, at least partially, from their archives at PRONI in Belfast. This is significant as the conflict between organisers of soccer and the GAA is of great importance to this thesis. It was association football which provided the biggest challenge for organisers of Gaelic football, as it was firmly established in Donegal in the 1890s and interest was not easily shifted to Gaelic games.

Therefore it is soccer which receives the most attention of any other code, and a thorough analysis of the conflict between soccer and GAA organisers in the county is provided, as the historiography of Irish sport still lacks a full examination of these sports going head to head.<sup>52</sup> Although research on the competition between the GAA and soccer in counties throughout Ireland is still in its infancy, what happened in Donegal is a clear example of the failure of the GAA to conquer all areas. The geography and regional variations of sports in Britain has been well investigated by historians such as John Bale, Dave Russell, Mike Huggins, Alan Metcalfe and Tony Collins and an attempt will be made to build on this work within an Irish setting.<sup>53</sup> In particular, Russell has focused on the conflict between rugby and soccer in northern England in the period from 1860 until the Great War and has looked at a number of key factors which influenced the spread, and

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<sup>52</sup> See Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: County by County*. This publication has noted the challenge posed by soccer to Gaelic football in the chapters on Antrim, Derry, Donegal, Down, Fermanagh, Kildare, Longford, Meath, Sligo, Tyrone, Westmeath and Wexford. Some county GAA histories have also touched on this subject. See, for example, Joseph Martin, *The GAA in Tyrone: The Long Road to Glory* [Second edition] (Dublin, 2003), p.129. The collapse of the county board in Tyrone in 1909 was thought to be perhaps due to an upsurge in soccer activity in the Omagh area with the result being a transferral of players from Gaelic to association football.

<sup>53</sup> See for example, Bale, 'Sport and National Identity', pp 18-41, Russell, 'Sporadic and Curious', pp 185-205, Alan Metcalfe, 'Football in the Mining Communities of East Northumberland 1882-1914' in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol.5, no.3 (1988), pp 269-91; 'The Control of Space and the Development of Twenty-two Sports in the Mining Communities of East Northumberland, 1880-1914' *The Sports Historian*, no. 15 (1995), pp 23-33; Mike Huggins 'The Spread of Association Football in North-east England, 1876- 90: The Pattern of Diffusion' in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol.6, no.3 (1989) pp 299-318 and Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football* (London, 1998).

decline, of these sports. These included the sporting tradition of schools and significance of cup competitions, finance, local pride and cultural boundaries. He has also noted the role of the press in stimulating interest and nationalising regional patterns of opinion. Religious institutions and ‘social control’ have also been identified as having some impact.<sup>54</sup>

Major studies of Irish soccer by Neal Garnham, Alan Bairner and John Sugden have failed to address the development of the game in Donegal to any great extent. Likewise, only a small number of soccer clubs such as Bonagee United and Swilly Rovers have produced books chronicling their recent histories.<sup>55</sup> In 1997, St Catherine’s of Killybegs published their club history to mark 100 years of soccer in the town but work on the early development of soccer in the county has been limited.<sup>56</sup> Therefore its early growth throughout Donegal will be explored further here. The conflict between Gaelic games and soccer in Donegal has attracted little interest from historians. While Dónal McAnallen has looked at this theme in an overview of the difficulties the GAA faced in Ulster in the period from 1884-1945, he focuses largely on events outside the county.<sup>57</sup> Neal Garnham also addressed the conflict in *Association Football and Society in Pre-partition Ireland* but with little reflection on what was happening in County Donegal.<sup>58</sup> Outside Ulster, there have been only a few attempts to address this topic. Those playing and organising cricket and soccer at the turn of the nineteenth century in County Westmeath were targeted in the local press. Tom Hunt has stated that cultural nationalists were concerned not only with their participation in but also ‘the cultural trappings and fraternisation that accompanied cricket and soccer.’<sup>59</sup> Unlike

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<sup>54</sup>Russell, ‘Sporadic and Curious’, pp 185-205.

<sup>55</sup> Neal Garnham, *Association Football and Society in Pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004) and John Sugden and Alan Bairner, *Sport, Sectarianism and Society in a Divided Ireland* (London, 1993); *Bonagee United Football Club: 40 years of Football 1970-2010* (Letterkenny, 2010); *Swilly Rovers FC: Team of ‘62* (Letterkenny, 2002).

<sup>56</sup> Gary Murrin(ed.), *St Catherine’s FC: A Celebration of 100 Years of Soccer in Killybegs* (Ballyshannon, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> McAnallen, ‘Cén Fáth a Raibh Cúige Uladh Chomh Lag Chomh Fada Sin? Deacrachtaí CLG ó Thuaidh, 1884-1945’ in McAnallen, Hassan and Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA*, pp 138-51.

<sup>58</sup>Garnham, *Association Football and Society*.

<sup>59</sup>Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.194.

Donegal, not every county in Ireland suffered from this conflict of interests. A study of the GAA in Dublin has illustrated that no rivalry existed between administrative bodies of Gaelic games and soccer.<sup>60</sup> In County Limerick, it was rugby which came into conflict with the GAA.<sup>61</sup> Similar events in Kerry will later be discussed.

At a local level there are some references to the competition between GAA and soccer administrators in a small number of Donegal GAA club histories published and some attempts have been made to account for the popularity of each code. A number of reasons why the GAA struggled to gain a place within society in Inishowen have been looked at in Burt GAA club's history *Against the Grain*. The fact that Lough Swilly was heavily militarised by the British until 1938 was thought to be the primary factor in the spread of soccer in this peninsula.<sup>62</sup> The isolated nature of the region, problems with paying registration fees to the Donegal GAA and a tendency to affiliate with the Derry county board for practical reasons such as transport links are other explanations which have been offered for the failure of the GAA to thrive in this area in the 1920s.<sup>63</sup> These appear to be reasonable explanations, but there were other factors involved which will be discussed in chapter five. To date, nobody has carried out a systematic analysis of the areas where soccer clubs were strongest and therefore this assessment is fundamental here. For the purpose of this study, the county of Donegal has been divided into the areas of south, south-west, east/north-east, west/north-west and Inishowen, and 1905 chosen as a starting point as this is when soccer began to face competition from Gaelic games in Donegal. These figures can act as a general guideline to the number of teams in operation and while not every selection may have been a fully fledged club, the fact that an effort was made in an area to get a group of eleven men together shows their interest in this sport.

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<sup>60</sup>William Nolan (ed.) *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin, 1884-2000* (Dublin, 2005).

<sup>61</sup>O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster: A Social and Cultural History*, p.52 and pp141-69.

<sup>62</sup>Campbell, Dowds and Mullan, *Against the Grain*, p.142.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p.121.



A few club historians have offered views as to why Gaelic football managed to prevail over soccer in the south-west of the county in the 1920s. The authors of Ardara's *Idir Peil agus Pobal* felt that

a number of factors contributed to the deterioration of the sport in the parish. The loss of Evans' field was a blow. The War of Independence however was a major factor which led to the nationwide explosion of patriotism. The game of association football was widely regarded as one of the great British traditions and therefore became 'taboo' in many parts of the country.<sup>64</sup>

A similar view was expressed in an article chronicling the development of the GAA in Glenties in which the author claimed that the beginning of Gaelic football in the parish in July 1921 'put an end to soccer football in Glenties for some considerable time.'<sup>65</sup> While soccer had initially been prominent in Kilcar, local historian Michéal Ó Domhnaill's views on the reasons for its decline there in the 1920s also reflect the theory that the Black and Tan treatment of locals meant that 'the men became much more nationalist and adopted the game of Gaelic football in preference to soccer.'<sup>66</sup> This will later be discussed as there is evidence to suggest that this transformation was not entirely due to the War of Independence and that soccer was already in decline in Ardara and Glenties prior to this.

As shown by Michael Oriard in his study of press coverage of college football in America, newspapers heightened public awareness of sport and helped the spread of the game.<sup>67</sup> Andrew Walker has argued that association football in Lincolnshire was primarily experienced through the contemporary press.<sup>68</sup> In an Irish setting, Eoghan Corry has stated that at the beginning of the 1900s, 'members of a more confident (Gaelic Athletic)

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<sup>64</sup>MacConaill (ed.) *Idir Peil agus Pobal*, pp 9-10.

<sup>65</sup>'History of Glenties GAA club' in *Donegal GAA Yearbook, 1978* (Ballyshannon, 1978), pp 23-4, p.23.

<sup>66</sup>Michéal Ó Domhnaill (ed.), *CLG Cill Cartha 1924-1984* (Kilcar, 1984), p.10. He also states that 'this trend was also very powerful in the colleges' where returning pupils 'brought these ideals home.'

<sup>67</sup>Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill, 1993).

<sup>68</sup>Andrew Walker, 'Reporting Play: The Local Newspaper and Sports Journalism, c. 1870-1914' in *Journalism Studies*, vol.6, no. 2 (2006) pp 452-62.

Association were anxious to ensure adequate media coverage' and has discussed the relationship between the GAA and the press in a recently published book.<sup>69</sup> Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have also examined the relationship between the media and the GAA. Donegal, however, has received little attention and this relationship will be fully discussed for the first time here.<sup>70</sup> In Donegal, the GAA-soccer conflict was facilitated and debated through the local press and, given the lack of remaining club records and archival sources, most of what was written on this is preserved through these newspapers.

Criticism of soccer by those in favour of Gaelic games was first expressed in 1905 and, while lessening in the years after 1908, again became prominent in the 1920s. While coverage of local GAA matches in the local press in the period from 1888 to 1904 had been sporadic, it was after this that reporting of these increased, and while this of course declined with the deterioration of the county board in 1907, the development of Gaelic games in the county in the 1920s resulted in weekly columns and more consistent coverage of GAA activity both within and outside of the county. Soccer in contrast struggled to gain as much recognition, with reports generally restricted to those sent in by club secretaries, usually of activities such as matches, meetings and dances with analysis of players and the progress of the game generally vague, although it must be noted that the attitude of newspaper editors varied in the amount of space afforded. Systematic reporting of sport through regular columns and articles was not really implemented until the 1920s. An exception to this would be the frequent GAA columns published in the *Derry People* and *Donegal News* in the opening decade of the century. Clearly GAA writers made a greater effort to publicise their sports, with soccer reports being less regular and generally shorter. Advertising of soccer matches was also poor in comparison with events offered by the GAA in this decade.

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<sup>69</sup>Eoghan Corry, 'The Mass Media and the Popularisation of Gaelic Games, 1884-1934' in McAnallen, Hassan and Hegarty (eds.), *The Evolution of the GAA*, pp 100-111, p.108.

<sup>70</sup>Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People's History*, pp 179-207.

Of great significance to this thesis is the socio-occupational structure of Donegal's GAA players and administrators. Although the background of players and administrators involved in sports such as soccer and cricket in Britain has been well documented, the study of the socio-occupational profiles of those participating in sport in Ireland have been limited to a small number of works and articles published in the last decade, the most notable of these being Tom Hunt's pioneering research on Westmeath and Neal Garnham's investigation of early professional soccer players.<sup>71</sup> This is the first study of the occupations of those involved in the GAA in Donegal, or indeed of any sport in the county. Using data from the 1901 and 1911 Census of Ireland and biographical information compiled from the local press, the socio-occupational structure of a number of those involved in the GAA has also been assessed and a comparison with Kerry and Westmeath is given. The occupations of players and officials was categorised into a similar structure as established in a general report on the Census of Ireland in 1881, 1891 and 1901 which was compiled at Trinity College, Dublin.<sup>72</sup> This classification was generally similar to that used by Hunt from the categories defined by the 1901 Census of Ireland volumes in his analysis of 500 hurlers and Gaelic footballers from the period from 1886 to 1905.<sup>73</sup> However I have stuck rigidly to the general report while Hunt adapted his categories slightly. Category one (Professional class) consisted of government officials and professionals such as teachers, doctors and solicitors while category two, the Domestic class, took in those working in domestic offices and services, for example servants. Category three (Commercial class) comprised of those engaged in commercial

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<sup>71</sup>See, for example, Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915* (Brighton, 1980); Derek Birley, *A Social History of English Cricket* (London, 1999); Hunt, *Sport and Society*; 'Parish Factions, Parading Bands and Sumptuous Repasts: The Diverse Origins and Activities of Early GAA Clubs' in McAnallen, Hassan and Hegarty (eds.), *The Evolution of the GAA*, pp 86-99; 'The GAA: Social Structure and Associated Clubs' in Cronin, Murphy and Rouse (eds.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association 1884-2009*, pp 183-202 and Garnham, *Association Football and Society*, pp 65-100.

<sup>72</sup> British Parliamentary Papers, Accounts and papers, Session 16, January 1902 –18 December 1902, Volume CXXIX, available at Jason Begley, Frank Geary and Kevin H. O'Rourke (eds.), HNAG Database of Irish Historical Statistics Retrieved from [http://www.tcd.ie/iiis/HNAG/HNAG\\_database.htm](http://www.tcd.ie/iiis/HNAG/HNAG_database.htm) [Accessed 11 July 2010]

<sup>73</sup>Hunt, 'The GAA: Social Structure', pp 184-5.

activities such as merchants, salesmen, drivers of vehicles and railway officials. Category four, the Agricultural class, consisted of those involved in agriculture such as farmers, farmers' sons, farm servants and agricultural labourers. The fifth category, described as the 'Industrial class' was made up of those employed in industrial work such as railway shunters, labourers and fishermen but also included shopkeepers, managers and assistants. Artisans such as shoemakers, boatbuilders, blacksmiths and painters were also noted here. The final category, the 'indefinite and non-productive class', which consisted of unclassified individuals such as children and women working at home, was left out and adapted by Hunt, but I have left this in for the purpose mainly of including scholars in this category. The inclusion of this data is central to this thesis as the everyday lives of early GAA players and officials have not received sufficient academic attention to date outside of the works mentioned.

Therefore a closer examination of those involved at grassroots level is needed as these men were central to its development. As Hunt has correctly stated, 'very little research has been carried out on the occupations of the early players and their social standing in the community.'<sup>74</sup> In addition to an assessment of Donegal's GAA players and organisers, an analysis of those playing and administrating association football is offered and a comparison of those involved in these sports is given. While assessments of all sets of these men are interesting in their own right, it is particularly necessary to include a comparison in order to assess if there were any major differences in the social classes and religious make-up of those playing and organising these codes. Aside from the work of Neil Garnham and Tom Hunt noted above, assessments of the socio-occupational backgrounds of Ireland's early soccer players and organisers are scarce.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Hunt, 'The GAA: Social Structure', p.183.

<sup>75</sup> See Garnham, *Association football and Society*, pp 65-100 and Hunt, *Sport and Society*, pp 177-88.

The necessity of funds and patronage for the running of sports clubs in Britain has been well documented. Neil Tranter has stated that ‘problems of finance were most frequent and damaging in the sports of cricket and soccer’ in nineteenth century Central Scotland.<sup>76</sup> The role of patrons is also of much importance to this thesis and the study of this in Ireland has been largely restricted to that undertaken by Cronin, Higgins, Hunt and Garnham.<sup>77</sup> An attempt will be made to assess the type of patronage available to Donegal’s GAA clubs while a number of these benefactors will be identified. How the GAA was viewed by those with social, economic and political influence in Donegal will be assessed. The role of spectators in the development of Gaelic games in the county will be addressed as will the changing nature of attendance at GAA matches, as this was transformed from scarce interest being shown, outside the Inishowen peninsula, in the early GAA clubs to the acceptance of inter-county matches and the Gaelic football county championship final as major sporting events by wide sections of Donegal society by the mid-1920s.

### **Chapter breakdown**

A thematic approach was used in chapters one, two and six while in chapters three, four and five a chronological approach was generally used. Chapter one gives the social, economic and political state of Donegal in the late nineteenth century and illustrates how society was developing in the opening decades of the twentieth century and attempts to set the scene for the development of sport in the county. It addresses the factors which, while benefiting the development of sport in England at this time, hindered its progress in Donegal. These included the cultural and physical divisions, the poor state of transport and communications, low levels of industry, high levels of seasonal migration and the poor

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<sup>76</sup>Neil Tranter, ‘The Chronology of Organized Sport in nineteenth-century Scotland: A Regional Study. II- Causes’ in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 7, no.3 (1990), pp 365-387, p.382.

<sup>77</sup>See Mike Cronin and Roisín Higgins, *Places We Play: Ireland’s Sporting Heritage* (Cork, 2011); Hunt, *Sport and Society* and Garnham, *Association Football and Society*.

education system in the county at the time. However, of great importance to the development of sport in the north-east of the county was its close location to Derry city. A number of political changes towards the end of the 1800s also paved the way for Catholics to gain a greater say within society, and in turn, later raise the profile of Gaelic games in the county. The change in the way that Ireland was policed, with the establishment of the Garda Síochána in the new Free State in 1922 and its impact on society, also had a significant bearing on the development of the GAA in the county. Chapter two gives an assessment of the state of sport in Donegal in the late nineteenth century with particular emphasis on the role played by pre-codified hurling within society. The foundations of Donegal's first sports clubs will also be discussed with particular attention being given to the development of association football as this was the most popular sport in Donegal by the early 1900s with cricket, rugby, athletics, regattas and horse racing failing to attract the same interest throughout the county at this point. The reasons why soccer clubs developed where they did is therefore explored. A comparison with rates of development of sporting institutions in County Westmeath illustrates that a number of these were organised at earlier or similar dates, although the diversity of sports available was not as great in Donegal. Some sports in Westmeath also benefited from stronger networks and patronage while the transport infrastructure was more advanced than in Donegal. Why sport failed to develop in the Laggan Valley will also be addressed and a comparison of trends in North-East England, East Northumberland and Stirling will be offered.

Chapter three examines the reasons for the weak state of the GAA in Donegal between 1884 and 1905. It illustrates that there was only isolated interest shown in Gaelic games in the county in this period and that early attempts to get the Association up and running generally took place in the north-east with the help of the GAA in Derry city. It will show that Donegal's early GAA clubs were more interested in playing friendly matches

against Derry clubs than engaging in competitive matches and this indirectly led to the decline of many. While the Parnell Split led to the nationwide collapse of the GAA, it was the decline of the GAA in Derry which therefore caused the progress of Donegal's clubs to stall. Added to this, the significance of a number of organisational problems within Gaelic games will be addressed.

In chapter four, the reasons for the successes and failures of Donegal's first GAA county board will be considered. Similarly the development of the GAA after the re-founding of the county board in 1919 will be assessed along with the political background to this organisation. It will show that the 1920s was a tough struggle to get the Association on a firm footing. While the effects of the War of Independence and the Civil War were not as severe on the GAA as in other counties, a number of other factors threatened the development of clubs. Emigration, lack of support, and low levels of finance were problematic for many teams although more significantly, it was in this decade that competitions in Gaelic football were firmly established and held annually. Increased interest in Gaelic football at club and inter-county level was reflected in an improvement in attendance figures at the end of the decade while the financial situation of the county board was greatly improved in the early 1930s. The reasons for hurling's failure to develop throughout the county will also be examined. Chapter five looks at the geography of Gaelic football and soccer and will show that by the early 1930s, Inishowen, along with a concentrated area west of Lough Swilly, was primarily a soccer zone, while soccer continued to be played in areas such as the west coast and the north-east. However, this code had been virtually wiped out in the south-west and south with less than a handful of soccer clubs in existence in these areas at this stage and the reasons for this will be discussed. An assessment of the socio-occupational backgrounds of soccer players and administrators is also given in this chapter. Chapter six looks at the social background of Gaelic games, and examines the changes which took place in the reasons

behind the founding of GAA clubs in the county. An assessment of the social activities provided by GAA clubs will be given as, while there was little interest in the early GAA, they became a greater part of social life in the 1920s and early 1930s. The socio-occupational background of GAA players and administrators will also be addressed in this chapter, while a comparison with soccer players and organisers is offered. Patronage was also a crucial component of GAA clubs and the way in which this changed throughout the period covered here will be examined. Finally the role of spectators in the development of the GAA in Donegal will be assessed. In its entirety, this thesis will demonstrate how and why a delayed sporting 'revolution' functioned in a peripheral Irish region. In doing so, it will make a valuable contribution to Irish and sporting history.



# Chapter 1: Donegal and Society, 1884-1934

## Introduction

This chapter will look at the social, economic and political conditions which existed in Donegal in the late nineteenth century and how society was changing by the opening decades of the twentieth century. It will show that Donegal's weak industrial, transport and communications infrastructure, allied with the awkward physical landscape and poverty of the county, greatly impacted on the spread of the early Gaelic Athletic Association and indeed, all 'modern' sports. Although a talented cricketer and someone who was also interested in rugby, Michael Cusack was eager to reform Irish athletics which was dominated by elitism and poorly governed in the early 1880s. He was also keen to revive traditional Irish football and hurling for workers excluded from athletics. It was this desire which was fundamental to his and Maurice Davin's organisation of the GAA at a meeting on 1 November 1884 in Thurles, County Tipperary.<sup>1</sup> According to Richard Holt, the foundation of 'the GAA was also part of a much wider international phenomenon: the creation of modern sport.'<sup>2</sup> It was also part of the Gaelic Revival which was taking place in Ireland at the time and Roy Foster has stated that it was 'the first landmark, emphasising physical training in the manner of contemporary Czech gymnastic clubs, and constructing a powerful rural network.'<sup>3</sup> Donegal's isolated, peripheral geographical position was not conducive to the spread of the GAA in the early years of the Association. Comprising of 1,197,154 acres and lying in the north-west of the province of Ulster, Donegal is, by area, the fourth largest county in Ireland but by the 1880s was still a very rural society in some areas.<sup>4</sup> It had been organised into a coherent structure in 1585 when it was formally recognised as a 'shire' and

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Rouse, 'Why the GAA was Founded' in Dónal McAnallen, David Hassan and Roddy Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA: Ulaidh, Éire agus Eile* (Armagh, 2009), pp 79-85, pp 84-5.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Holt, 'Ireland and the Birth of Modern Sport' in Mike Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse (eds.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association 1884-2009* (Dublin, 2009), pp 33-46, p.33.

<sup>3</sup>Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London, 1988), p.447.

<sup>4</sup>*Thom's Official Directory of the Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for the Year 1884* (Dublin, 1884), p.1057.

its boundaries slowly took shape in the decades following this.<sup>5</sup> Despite this, whether or not the county of Donegal was ever truly united, with its regional differences, is debatable. According to Mary Daly, Gaelic games, along with politics, played an important part in forging county identity and rivalries.<sup>6</sup> Patrick Fitzgerald has stated that ‘all counties, of course, exhibit local variation but Donegal, not least in terms of its social and economic history, seemed unusually hard to represent as having had a particular “county” experience.’<sup>7</sup> The ways in which Donegal differed as a county from other peripheral Irish counties, and the geographical and economic variations which existed within the county, will be examined in this chapter.

It is clear that a number of factors which influenced the spread of sport in parts of England in the latter half of the nineteenth century were lacking, or were poorly developed, within Donegal at this time. One of these was the development of the railway. It has been stated that ‘the founding of the GAA coincided with the height of the railway-building boom in Ireland and its impact was clear from the beginning...the railways quickly became a central feature of life for those playing and competing in the GAA.’<sup>8</sup> While this may have been the case elsewhere, the slow development of the railway network in Donegal undoubtedly hindered this development within the county. The economy of the county and levels of industry were poor and this is significant as according to Neil Tranter, ‘the more industrial and commercial the economy the greater the extent of organized sport and the earlier its inception.’<sup>9</sup> Donegal was certainly slow to develop as an industrialized area in

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<sup>5</sup>Jim MacLaughlin, ‘Introduction: The Making of a Northern County’ in Jim MacLaughlin (ed.), *Donegal: The Making of a Northern County* (Dublin, 2007), pp 1-21, p.6.

<sup>6</sup>Mary E. Daly (ed.), *County and Town: One Hundred Years of Local Government in Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p.9.

<sup>7</sup>Patrick Fitzgerald, ‘Emigration from Donegal and the Irish Emigration Database Project’ in *Donegal Annual*, 2000, no.52 (Letterkenny, 2000), pp 57- 62, p. 52.

<sup>8</sup>Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: A People’s History* (Cork, 2009), p.82.

<sup>9</sup>Neil Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain, 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), p.29. An exception to this trend would be North Tipperary, a poorly industrialised area which had a large concentration of GAA clubs in the late nineteenth century.

comparison to much of mainland Britain. However, as will be seen later in this thesis, the influence of external factors, such as the close proximity of a number of sports clubs and governing bodies in Derry city, to the north-east of the county, benefited the development of sport there. The role of educational establishments in the spread of sport in England has been well documented.<sup>10</sup> Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have also stated that ‘a key factor in the spread of organised sport across Ireland was the educational system.’<sup>11</sup> Therefore the educational structure within Donegal, and throughout Ireland, will be assessed as it is clear that not everybody in the county could, or wanted to, avail of these opportunities at this time.

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<sup>10</sup>See for example, Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain*, p. 29.

<sup>11</sup>Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People's History*, p. 13.

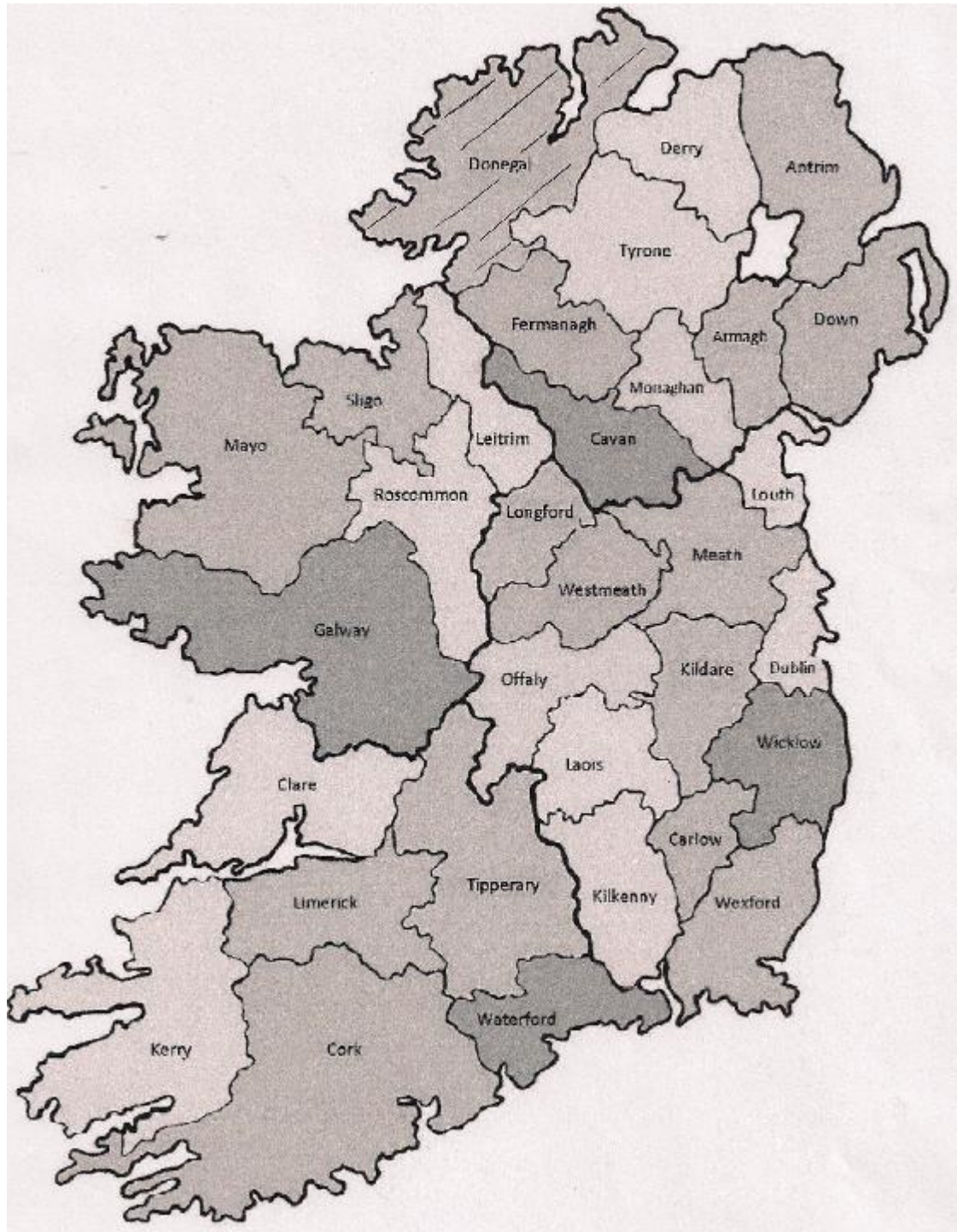


Figure 1.1: Ireland , prior to partition in 1921, with Donegal's location outlined. Source: 'Irish Genealogy Toolkit' Retrieved from <http://www.irish-genealogy-toolkit.com/County-map-of-Ireland.html> [accessed 30 Oct. 2011]

Like much of Ireland, Donegal was affected by the mid-nineteenth century famine that afflicted Ireland. The Great Famine, which took place between 1846 and 1851, had a

devastating effect on Irish society. Alvin Jackson believes that ‘the death of 1 million people in a population of (at its peak) around 8.25 million, combined with the migration of 1.5 million in only ten years (1845-1855), could not fail to have devastating and lasting consequences.’<sup>12</sup> While the province of Ulster was not as badly affected as the west and south of the country, it was Leinster which suffered the least.<sup>13</sup> Donegal, with an average annual rate of excess deaths or ‘the number over and above those who would have died from the usual causes’ of 10.7 per thousand between 1846-51, fell below the national average and did not fare as badly as other areas such as Cavan where the rate was 42.7.<sup>14</sup> This was because, as Jonathan Bardon has stated, ‘the well-established pattern of seasonal migration and emigration allowed a great many of the destitute to escape just before the famine or during its early stages.’<sup>15</sup> Donegal, at the time of the Great Famine, had been divided into a number of poor law unions which, in 1838, had been organised throughout Ireland to relieve the hardship of the poor who could be admitted to workhouses based within the area covered by these unions. These were located in Ballyshannon (which also covered parts of Fermanagh and Leitrim), Donegal town, Dunfanaghy, Glenties, Carndonagh, Letterkenny, Milford and Stranorlar and these towns had their own workhouses where the destitute poor, including ‘the aged, sick, infirm and widows with two or more children’ were admitted and were entitled to meals and beds although they also had to work.<sup>16</sup> The mixed nature of the famine’s impact on Donegal, and the organisational spread of the Poor Law Unions, say much about the geography of Donegal.

Donegal in the early 1880s contained a number of geographical and economic variations. One reporter summarised these when he stated in 1883 that

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<sup>12</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford, 1999), p.81.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* [Updated edition] (Belfast, 2001), p.307.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 307-8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.308.

<sup>16</sup> Arlene Crampsie, ‘Relieving the Destitute Poor: A History of Milford Workhouse’ in *Donegal Annual*, 2004, no. 56 (Letterkenny, 2004), pp 68-87, p.68.

The county of Donegal may be roughly regarded as being divided into three parts. A wild stretch of barren waste and mountain runs through the middle of the county from north to south, and is practically uninhabited; the eastern portion of Donegal is well settled, and the people comfortable; but the western portions of the county are congested in some parts and waste in others.<sup>17</sup>

Donegal is divided by the Derryveagh mountains in the north-west and the Blue Stack mountains further south. This meant that the west and east of the county remained divided, physically, culturally and economically. There were a number of religious denominations to be found in Donegal in 1881. Roman Catholics made up 76.5% of the total population of 206,035 and 12% belonged to the Church of Ireland while just over 10% were Presbyterians. Methodists made up just 1% of the population.<sup>18</sup> The West Donegal region was mainly inhabited by Roman Catholics and was badly affected by seasonal migration to Scotland and the Laggan. It contains the Rosses, which is made up of the parishes of Templecrone and Lettermacaward, with Dungloe the only present day town located in this area.<sup>19</sup> According to Frank Sweeney, ‘without railways, piers and organised shipping, and suffering from a poorly developed road network, the Rosses was isolated from the trade and commercial centres of Derry, Letterkenny and Strabane’ in the late 1800s.<sup>20</sup> Further north, the parishes of Gweedore and Cloughaneely make up the rest of the north-west coastal area and like the Rosses, agriculturally this is a poor region.

The more fertile land in the east of the county in the Laggan Valley area meant that many Protestant farmers, most of whom were descended from Scottish settlers who arrived as part of the Ulster Plantation which began in 1608, generally enjoyed a more prosperous lifestyle than their western Catholic counterparts. As Lecky stated in 1908, East Donegal was ‘largely Protestant’ and a more prosperous region than the west of the county in which the

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<sup>17</sup>*Derry Journal*, (Hereafter referred to as *DJ*), 3 Dec. 1883.

<sup>18</sup>*Thom's Official Directory of Ireland for the Year 1930* (Dublin, 1930), p.1007.

<sup>19</sup>Frank Sweeney, *The Murder of Conell Boyle* (Dublin, 2002), p.57.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p.9.

land was mountainous and poorer. Roman Catholics generally made up this latter area and his assertion that ‘there are two Donegals-an outer and an inner’ summed up the divides between these areas.<sup>21</sup> The Laggan region was generally a fertile area of land stretching from Inishowen at the bottom of Lough Swilly and running in a southerly direction past Stranorlar and Castlefin, although Anne O’Dowd has stated that ‘the core of the Laggan lies between Letterkenny and Derry and its boundaries can really only be defined by the distance travelled by the farmers to the hiring fairs where the workers made themselves available.’<sup>22</sup> This area had been developed by Scottish and English settlers having been granted these lands after the Flight of the Earls in 1607.<sup>23</sup> Carrigans, Manorcunningham, St Johnston, Letterkenny, Lifford, Raphoe, Convoy, Stranorlar and Castlefin all lie in this region.<sup>24</sup> Prior to the Great War, Protestants influence was significant in this area and Catholics made up between only 50 and 65 per cent of the population in the Laggan Valley.<sup>25</sup> Darren McGettigan has stated that it was this area which ‘was the most successfully settled area within the entire six official counties of the Ulster plantation.’<sup>26</sup>

Inishowen, a peninsula lying in the north-east between Lough Swilly to the west and Lough Foyle to the east, stretches to the most northernly point in Ireland, Malin Head and was somewhat isolated from the rest of Donegal. Although Buncrana and Carndonagh are the biggest towns in this area, villages of note include Burt, Newtowncunningham, Killea, Portlough, Culdaff and Moville. Lough Swilly was an important British military base and until 1938, there were ‘artillery stations at the forts of Rathmullan, Knockalla, Muckamish,

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<sup>21</sup> Reverend Alexander G. Lecky, *In the Days of the Laggan Presbytery* (Belfast, 1908), p.1.

<sup>22</sup> Anne O’Dowd, ‘Seasonal Migration to the Lagan and Scotland’ in Nolan, Ronayne and Dunlevy (eds.), *Donegal History and Society*, pp 625-48, p.632.

<sup>23</sup> Lecky, *In the Days of the Laggan Presbytery*, p.1.

<sup>24</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/reading-room/history-heritage/history-of-ireland/the-ulster-plantation/the-plantation-of-the-lag/> [Accessed 20 Oct. 2011]

<sup>25</sup> Jim MacLaughlin, ‘The Politics of Nation-building in Post-Famine Donegal’ in Nolan, Ronayne and Dunlevy (eds.), *Donegal History and Society*, pp 583-623, p.587.

<sup>26</sup> Darren McGettigan, *The Donegal Plantation and the Tír Chonaill Irish 1610-1710* (Dublin, 2010), p.58.

Dunree, Inch and Ned's Point.<sup>27</sup> To the west of Lough Swilly, lie the towns of Rathmullan, Ramelton, Milford and Kilmacrennan with Creeslough and Dunfanaghy situated further north-west. As will be seen, significantly for the development of sport in the north-east of Donegal, the close location of these northern areas to Derry city was a major factor in the spread of sport there. As Jonathan Bardon has noted, 'Derry had become a thriving commercial and industrial centre by the beginning of the twentieth century' and although its economy experienced a decline in the early 1900s, it was 'at the very edge of Ulster's industrial region centred on Belfast.'<sup>28</sup> In the south-west of the county, the landscape has more in common with the Rosses than the Laggan area, and Killybegs, Ardara, Glenties, Kilcar and Glencolumbkille are all located in this area. The land is better in the southern area of the county, which begins at the Eany river in Inver and stretches to the Drowes river in Bundoran, covering the villages of Mountcharles, Laghey and Ballintra. Donegal is the central town of this area although Ballyshannon was the largest town in the county in 1881 with a population of 2,840, and along with Lifford, was an important military base at the time. Bundoran is the most southern town in the county.<sup>29</sup>

It could be argued that the sparse population and physical nature of the county was not conducive to the development of sport in Donegal as the level of industry in an area has been noted as having a significant influence on the founding of sporting clubs.<sup>30</sup> As Mike Cronin and Roisín Higgins have stated, 'the development of sport in Ireland...was not a simply a process that aped and duplicated what had happened in Britain.'<sup>31</sup> Not all towns and villages in Donegal were sufficiently developed to earn a mention in *Thom's Official Directory for the Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland* in the early 1880s and only those with over 500

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<sup>27</sup> *Thom's Official Directory 1884*, p.1057.

<sup>28</sup> Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, pp 395-6.

<sup>29</sup> *Thom's Official Directory 1884*, p.1057.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Tom Hunt, 'Parish Factions, Parading Bands and Sumptuous Repasts: The Diverse Origins and Activities of Early GAA Clubs' in McNallen, Hassan and Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA*, p.90 and Garnham, *Association Football and Society in Pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004), pp 47-9.

<sup>31</sup> Cronin and Higgins, *Places We Play: Ireland's Sporting Heritage* (Cork, 2011), p.33.



inhabitants were noted.<sup>32</sup> While Dublin's population was 348, 525 and Belfast had a population of 208,122 in 1881, Donegal had only two towns, Ballyshannon and Letterkenny, with populations of over 2,000.<sup>33</sup> Only four towns, Ramelton, Moville, Ballybofey and Donegal town were inhabited by over 1,000 people while there were only nine other villages with populations of over 500 persons. These were located in Raphoe, Buncrana, Killybegs, Carndonagh, Bundoran, Dunfanaghy, Ardara, Rathmullan and Lifford.<sup>34</sup> Significantly, there were only three villages to the west of the Derryveagh and the Blue Stack mountains with populations of over 500 people. One of these was Dunfanaghy in the north-west while Ardara and Killybegs in the south-west were also more densely populated than other areas around the coast. The majority of County Donegal's more urban areas were located in the north, north-east and south of the county.

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<sup>32</sup>See Table 1.1.

<sup>33</sup>*Thom's Official Directory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for the Year 1883* (Dublin, 1883), p.1023 and *Thom's Directory 1884*, p.1057.

<sup>34</sup>*Thom's Official Directory 1884*, p.1057.

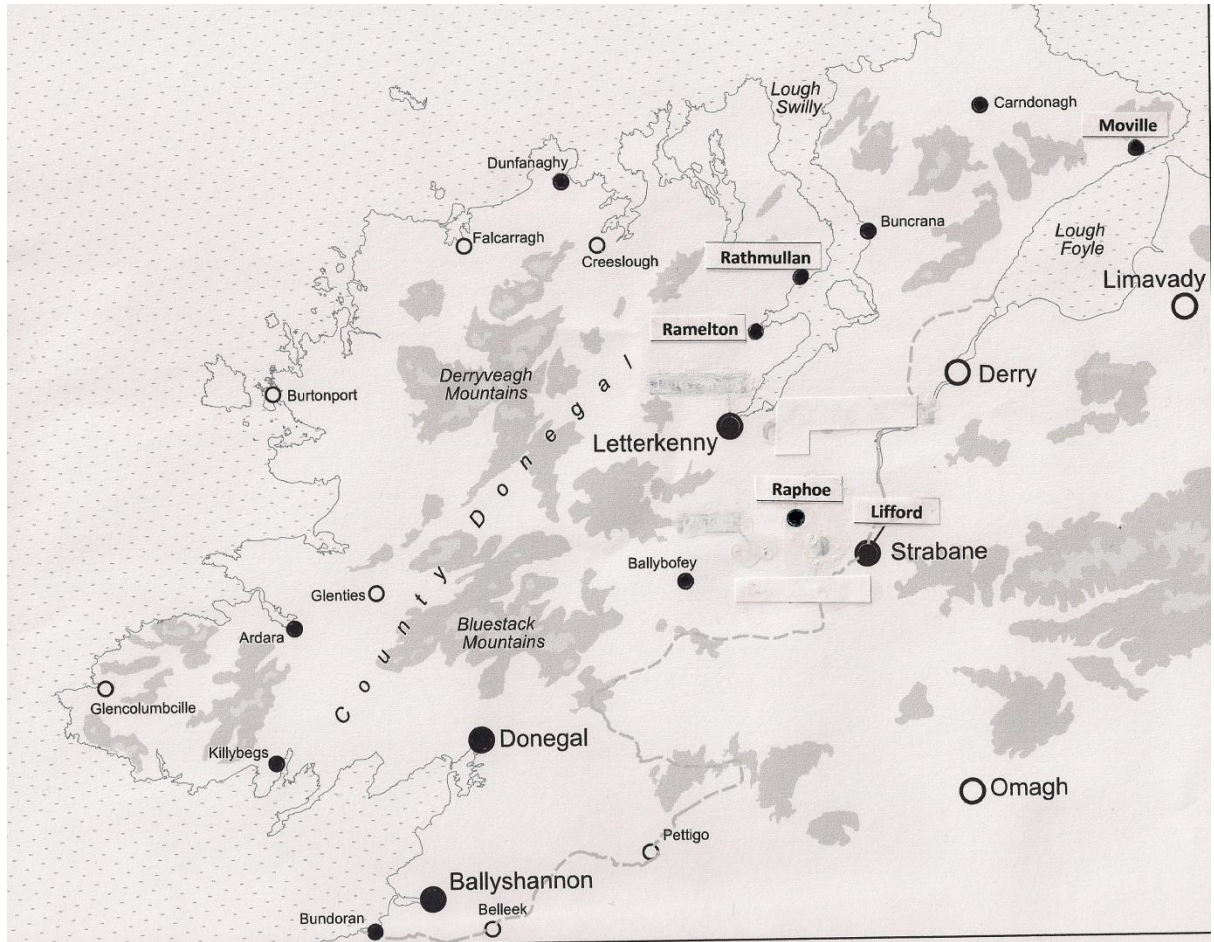


Figure 1.2: Towns and villages of County Donegal inhabited by over 500 persons, 1881 (denoted with a black dot). Source: *Thom's Official Directory 1884*, p.1057.

Table 1.1: Towns and villages of County Donegal inhabited by over 500 persons, 1881.

Town/village	Population in 1881
Ballyshannon	2,840
Letterkenny	2,188
Donegal	1,416
Ramelton	1,406
Moville	1,129
Ballybofey	1,009
Raphoe	986
Buncrana	764
Killybegs	764
Carndonagh	726
Bundoran	703
Dunfanaghy	598
Ardara	552
Rathmullan	515
Lifford	511

Source: *Thom's Official Directory, 1884*, p.1057.

Writing in *Donegal: The Making of a Northern County*, Jim MacLaughlin has stated that Donegal, due to its 'geographical and maritime intimacy with Britain', shared a number of connections with Scotland and England. These included a 'social history, popular history, religion, and of course people.'<sup>35</sup> The county also, he believes, had a significant role 'as an Ulster county in seventeenth-century British colonial expansion.' The arrival of the aforementioned Scottish settlers in the seventeenth century and migration to England and Scotland from the following century onwards also meant that the structure of the county was altered, economically, politically and socially. Differing forms of worship, business practices, and new methods of farming were all introduced by the Scots and Donegal was transformed from 'a bastion of Gaeldom into an ethnically-mixed enclave that was part of a much wider world.'<sup>36</sup> This was later significant for the development of sport, particularly in East Donegal where the differing attitudes to business and general progress shown by the descendants of these settlers than by those in the poor western region, added to greater opportunities, meant that by the late nineteenth century, the former area was more amenable to the development of sports such as cricket and a more efficient transport infrastructure was in place there.

MacLaughlin has also identified a number of differences between Donegal and other counties on the west coast of Ireland. As Lecky has stated, it was the east of the county which mostly resembled mid-Ulster in the way it was inhabited with settlers from Scotland.<sup>37</sup> This part of Donegal had more in common with Ulster, both economically and culturally, than with the economics and politics of southern Ireland, and in this way differed significantly from 'impoverished western counties like Cork, Kerry, Galway and Mayo.'<sup>38</sup> Added to this,

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<sup>35</sup> MacLaughlin, 'Introduction: The Making of a Northern county', p.2.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.,

these settlers helped transform Donegal's economy and strengthened links with Ulster through their industrial enterprise. Finally, although there was another class of Presbyterians which MacLaughlin calls 'humbler settlers' who had less land than those in the Ascendency further south in Ireland and were less wealthy than those who looked to Britain for leadership, they were also somewhat distant from the native peasants. The Protestant population of the county was therefore 'a distinct Donegal community' with 'its own schools, newspapers, churches, marriage patterns, social networks and class structure.'<sup>39</sup> According to Darren McGettigan, 'the plantation was less successful in other parts of the county.'<sup>40</sup> While there was also 'a substantial settlement' in the south around Donegal town and Ballyshannon and on the western side of Lough Swilly, 'the mountainous interior and Gaelic west of the county was very lightly settled indeed.'<sup>41</sup>

### **Industry and poverty**

Despite the relative prosperity of a number of those in the Laggan area, other areas in Donegal were not so well developed and famine continued to be a problem for many of those along the coast. As late as 1879 it was reported that 'at least 66,000 people' were affected and 'distress was widespread.'<sup>42</sup> County Donegal in the 1880s suffered from a general lack of industry and many people along the south-west coast in areas such as Kilcar, Killybegs and Glencolumbkille struggled to make ends meet.<sup>43</sup> Most of the land in Ireland was owned by landlords with one estimate putting this figure of ownership at 97% in 1870.<sup>44</sup> The failure of the potato crop and a lack of available work in Scotland and the Laggan meant that many families in the west of the county were in debt and a lack of help given by the Poor Law

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<sup>39</sup> MacLaughlin, 'Introduction: The Making of a Northern County', p.3.

<sup>40</sup> McGettigan, *The Donegal Plantation*, p.59.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>42</sup> Desmond Murphy, 'The Land War in Donegal 1879-1891' in *Donegal Annual*, 1980, no. 32 (Ballyshannon, 1980), pp 476-86, p. 477.

<sup>43</sup> Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, pp. 362-3.

<sup>44</sup> Pádraig S. Ó Baoighill, *Cardinal Patrick O'Donnell 1856-1927* (Fintown, 2008), p.28.

Union, combined with unreasonable demands by landlords, did little to alleviate their distress.<sup>45</sup> Living conditions in Gweedore were poor with small homes built from turf and having only a hole in the roof as a chimney, and a low entrance acting as a doorway. Many had no windows and little space for habitation.<sup>46</sup> The threat of eviction loomed over many peasants and in July 1884 it was reported following the removal of a number of people in their homes in the north-west that ‘Gweedore has a sad notoriety. Poverty and privation have been the portion of its peasantry. Their lot is cast in circumstances in which comfort or any approach to competence is not in human power to maintain.’<sup>47</sup>

While the development of sport in England in the nineteenth century had been helped by a series of Acts which restricted working hours, these made little difference to those in Donegal and although their significance has been noted for allowing workers more free time for sport, particularly at weekends, it was in industrial centres such as Belfast and Dublin where the greatest changes occurred. In particular, Garnham has noted the impact of the 1874 Act in the former city where its introduction meant that ‘many working men in Belfast came to enjoy Saturday afternoons off work for the first time.’<sup>48</sup> However, as Mike Cronin has stated, in Ireland, these acts made little difference to the majority of Irish workers as most of these people were only involved in subsistence agriculture.<sup>49</sup> For many Donegal people, Sunday remained the only day to participate in sport, and as late as 1906, there were calls in the local press for a reduction in working hours in Donegal town and Letterkenny. ‘A Donegal counter-hopper’, in a response to local criticism that camán was taking place in Donegal town on Sundays and those involved were desecrating the Sabbath, stated that ‘when shop assistants have to stand behind the counter from seven am till ten pm with merely time

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<sup>45</sup>Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, pp 362-4.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p.363.

<sup>47</sup>*DJ*, 4 July 1884.

<sup>48</sup>Garnham, *Association Football and Society*, p.11.

<sup>49</sup>Mike Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity Since 1884* (Dublin, 1999), p.104.

to swallow their meals, is it to be wondered at that when Sunday comes they want a bit of recreation?’<sup>50</sup> He felt that ‘a half-holiday once a week, or early closing every evening, would have more effect in remedying this evil than all the sermons that could be preached on the subject.’<sup>51</sup> A public meeting on shorter working hours in Letterkenny was called for around this time after a petition ‘for the compulsory closing of shops at seven (except on Saturday) was presented from (sic) the traders of the town’ to the Letterkenny Urban Council.<sup>52</sup> However, it is unclear when these changes were implemented into Donegal society and this lack of freedom undoubtedly impacted on the development of sport in the county. In the majority of cases in the 1890s, soccer and cricket matches were organised for Saturdays and this probably deterred those with less flexible working hours from taking part.<sup>53</sup>

One way in which the Industrial Revolution did have a big impact on Donegal was in the numbers who left the county to seek work in Britain and further afield. Emigration and seasonal migration were the only choices for many young people. The number of people living in the county had decreased from 296, 448 in 1861 to 206,035 twenty years later.<sup>54</sup> Between 1851 and 1881, approximately 80,000 people left Donegal and many of these were young men and women.<sup>55</sup> In the late nineteenth century 89 out of 149 electoral divisions in the county were said to be ‘congested.’<sup>56</sup> These congested districts were areas where ‘it was extremely difficult to maintain life except at a very low standard of living.’<sup>57</sup> While social conditions had still not improved in areas along the coast such as Inver, Carrick and Kilcar as

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<sup>50</sup>*Londonderry Sentinel* (Hereafter referred to as *LS*), 3 May 1906.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 8 May 1906.

<sup>53</sup>See for example, *Derry Standard* (Hereafter referred to as *DS*), 16 Oct. 1894 and 29 Nov. 1895 for Co. Donegal FA fixtures and *Ibid.*, 14 June, 1, 3 and 17 July 1895 for matches in the Co. Donegal cricket league.

<sup>54</sup>*Thom's Official Directory 1884*, p.1057 and John Tunney, ‘The Marquis, the Reverend, the Grandmaster and the Major: Protestant Politics in Donegal, 1868-1933’ in William Nolan, Liam Ronayne and Mairead Dunlevy (eds.), *Donegal History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1995), pp 675-95, p.685.

<sup>55</sup>MacLaughlin, ‘Introduction: The Making of Northern County’, p.12.

<sup>56</sup>Jim MacLaughlin, ‘Social Class Impact of the Famine in Donegal’ in Mac Laughlin (ed.), *The Making of a Northern County*, pp 192-8, p.194.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*,

late as 1894, the setting up of the Congested District Board in 1891 helped relaunch the fishing industry in Donegal by early 1895 and this helped alleviate the famine which was prevalent in the county at the time.<sup>58</sup> However, MacLaughlin believes that ‘the Congested Districts Board ultimately failed [t]here because it never commanded sufficient local resources with which to tackle larger problems of rural underdevelopment.’<sup>59</sup>

Donegal in the 1880s was primarily an agrarian society and ‘in 1881 no less than eighty percent of the male population worked on the land.’<sup>60</sup> It was also ‘among the most rural counties in the entire country.’ In the late nineteenth century visitors to the west coast of the county ‘suggested that the centuries fell away as one approached the Atlantic shoreline.’<sup>61</sup> Although agriculture was said to be the main occupation in 1881, home industries such as knitting, tweed making and embroidery were commonplace in the agriculturally poor western area of Donegal. Fishing was also carried out along the coast, while ‘the making of kelp from seaweed’ for exportation to Glasgow was also a common activity in that area.<sup>62</sup> Donegal’s primary fishing ports in the 1880s were located in Buncrana, Rathmullan, Donegal town and Killybegs.<sup>63</sup> Of more significance to the people of west and north-west Donegal was the reliance on seasonal migration to Scotland and the Laggan and ‘in 1880, seasonal migrants from Donegal accounted for 47 per cent of the Ulster total.’<sup>64</sup> For many families in the west and north-west, sending their children to the hiring fairs for agricultural labour in the Laggan

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<sup>58</sup>Pat Conaghan, *The Zulu Fishermen: Forgotten Pioneers of Donegal’s First Fishing Industry* (Killybegs, 2003), pp 31-5 and p. 297.

<sup>59</sup>MacLaughlin, ‘Introduction: The Making of a Northern County’, p.14.

<sup>60</sup>MacLaughlin, ‘Conclusion’ in MacLaughlin (ed.), *Donegal: The Making of a Northern County*, pp 358-70, p.364.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p.363.

<sup>62</sup>*Thom’s Official Directory 1884*, p.1057.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>64</sup>O’Dowd, ‘Seasonal Migration to the Laggan and Scotland’, p.643.

was not only necessary but the time spent there also served as work experience for future migration to Scotland.<sup>65</sup>

According to Anne O'Dowd, 'the Irish presence was noted throughout Great Britain in the 1700s, implying an already considerable movement of temporary agricultural workers.'<sup>66</sup> Pat Bolger believes that in the late 1800s, 'the most striking feature of West Donegal was the close interaction with Scotland mediated through the large-scale annual migration in search of work.'<sup>67</sup> This feature of life in Donegal had increased throughout the nineteenth century and 'in 1895 the men who left the Rosses, Gweedore and Cloughaneely as soon as they had planted their own crops in the springtime, did not return again until after Christmas.'<sup>68</sup> This migration in search of work was not unique to Donegal and was common to other areas such as from Roscommon and Mayo to Kildare.<sup>69</sup> However, it appears that Mayo was the only county which experienced the dissemination of soccer in a similar way to West Donegal where returning migrants from Scotland brought association football home to their native villages. While the development of sport in the West Donegal area must surely have been affected by the wide scale exodus of young men, in this way, the organisation of sport did benefit and this will be examined in more detail in chapter two.

By the 1890s the Poor Law Union of Dunfanaghy had a migration rate of 45.6 per 1,000 while the Glenties' area's rate was 35.8 and Milford's was 12.9 although this had dropped substantially by the 1900s.<sup>70</sup> This seasonal migration also had, as Desmond Murphy has stated, a detrimental effect on education and literacy in the county and 'although the (illiteracy) rate fell from 52.1 per cent in 1861 to 20.6 in 1911, that figure was then the

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<sup>65</sup>O'Dowd, 'Seasonal Migration to the Lagan and Scotland', p.631.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p.629.

<sup>67</sup>Pat Bolger, 'The Congested Districts Board and the Co-Ops in Donegal' in Nolan, Ronayne and Dunlevy (eds.), *Donegal History and Society*, pp 649-71, p.649.

<sup>68</sup>O'Dowd, 'Seasonal migration to the Lagan and Scotland', p.643.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p.630.

<sup>70</sup>Desmond Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster 1790-1921* (Derry, 1981), p.223.



highest in Ireland and within Donegal there were three times as many illiterate Catholics as Protestants.<sup>71</sup> It was in West Donegal that the rate was higher than in any other district.<sup>72</sup> This low level of literacy was also significant for the dissemination of sport as ‘through the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, daily newspapers greatly expanded their coverage of sport.’<sup>73</sup> While the National School system had been in operation since 1831 and Donegal had 410 primary schools by 1881, many parents in West Donegal placed a strong emphasis on preparing their children for the hiring fairs at market towns such as Strabane and Letterkenny, staged twice a year, where they were rented out for farm labour on the Laggan, usually for a six month period.<sup>74</sup> Murphy also believes that ‘linguistic difficulties in Gaeltacht areas and the indifferent quality of the teaching worsened matters.’<sup>75</sup> Superstitions and traditional customs were still prevalent by the late 1800s in the Rosses area.<sup>76</sup> While the rates of illiteracy were much higher than in other districts, at the beginning of the twentieth century the standard of living in West Donegal was improving and the acceptance of emigration to North America, instead of Scotland, made many families more aware of the financial advantages of staying in education.<sup>77</sup> As Mary-Louise Legg has stated, ‘by the 1890s, the habit of reading a newspaper was entering its golden age. To be able to read was no longer just a skill to keep a man from drink, it was an important passport to entry into the modern world.’<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster*, p.228.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>73</sup> Rouse, ‘Sport and Ireland in 1881’, pp 20-1.

<sup>74</sup> *Thom's Official Directory 1884*, p.1057.

<sup>75</sup> Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster*, pp 227-9. The Gaeltacht is a designated Irish speaking region, mainly containing parts of counties Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Cork and Waterford and further inland, areas of County Meath.

<sup>76</sup> Sweeney, *The Murder of Conell Boyle*, pp 17-9.

<sup>77</sup> Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster*, p.229.

<sup>78</sup> Mary-Louise Legg, *The Irish Provincial Press 1850-1892* (Dublin, 1999), p.175.

## Education

MacLaughlin has asserted that in 1881 'less than one quarter of all children over five years of age were attending school and there were fewer than 2,400 post-primary students in the entire county.'<sup>79</sup> Generally speaking, the educational system in Donegal in the nineteenth century was poor and not conducive to the development of sport as 'only a very small number of Donegal people received post-primary education' in the 1800s.<sup>80</sup> There were only a small number of second-level education establishments functioning in Donegal in the nineteenth century, these being the Royal School in Raphoe which had been founded in 1608, the Literary Institute in Letterkenny where young men were prepared for the priesthood and the Prior Endowed School in Lifford, which later became amalgamated with the Royal School in Raphoe. St Columba's Industrial School in Killybegs, which catered for those interested in technical education, was opened in 1896.<sup>81</sup> A polytechnic school was also in operation in Ramelton by that year.<sup>82</sup>

There is little to suggest that opportunities for Donegal people to receive third level education were much better. Donegal had no colleges until the twentieth century and Trinity College, Dublin, founded in 1592, was Ireland's first university but catered mainly for Protestants.<sup>83</sup> Maynooth College was founded in 1795 but after 1817, only those wishing to become priests could enrol. In 1849 the Queen's colleges at Belfast, Cork and Galway were opened, but Catholic clergy were banned by the Synod of Thurles from working in these three educational establishments. The Catholic University of Ireland was founded in 1854 but Pádraig Ó Baoighill has stated that 'the progress of the university was hampered by a number of factors - the smallness of the Catholic middle class, the scarcity of educational

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<sup>79</sup>MacLaughlin, 'Introduction: The Making of a Northern County', p.12.

<sup>80</sup>Helen Meehan and Godfrey Cass, *Tracing Your Donegal Ancestors* [Second edition] (Dublin, 2008), pp 93-9.

<sup>81</sup>Ó Baoighill, *Cardinal Patrick O'Donnell*, p.181 and p. 289.

<sup>82</sup>*DJ*, 14 Oct. 1896.

<sup>83</sup>Ó Baoighill, *Cardinal Patrick O'Donnell*, p.215.

opportunities, and the lack of a system of secondary schools.’<sup>84</sup> The failure of the government to publicly acknowledge its importance through the awarding of a charter also hindered its development.<sup>85</sup> Given that the majority of Donegal’s population was Catholic, these factors did not help their chances of gaining third-level education. The introduction of the Royal University of Ireland in 1879 did however allow Catholics to gain degrees.<sup>86</sup> In any case, it is difficult to establish exactly how many Donegal students attended these institutions. There is clear evidence that ex-university students participated in the organisation of rugby and soccer in County Westmeath but given the lack of references to this type of dissemination of sport in the local press in Donegal, the exact extent of this type of involvement in the formation of Donegal’s sporting clubs in the nineteenth century is harder to define.<sup>87</sup> Given Donegal’s isolation from these education centres in the nineteenth century, neither opportunity nor transport would have it easy for anyone wishing to attend third-level educational establishments.

### **Poor transport and communications network**

In general, the transport and communications network in Donegal in the 1880s was poor and the development of sport was not helped by this. In 1884 the county was described as ‘mountainous and boggy’ while lakes and rivers were said to be ‘numerous, but small.’<sup>88</sup> In the north-west, the nearest telegraph station to Dunfanaghy around that time was situated eighteen miles away in Gweedore.<sup>89</sup> In addition to complaints in October 1886 in the *Derry Journal* about the absence of a telegraph station along the coast from Dunfanaghy in the north-west to Glenties in the south-west, a correspondent in Letterkenny commented that more inland rural areas such as Fintown, Churchill and Glenswilly were also hampered by the

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<sup>84</sup> Ó Baoighill, *Cardinal Patrick O'Donnell*, p.217.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.219.

<sup>87</sup> See Hunt, *Sport and Society*, pp 171-4.

<sup>88</sup> *Thom's Official Directory 1884*, p.1057.

<sup>89</sup> *DJ*, 4 July 1884.

same problem.<sup>90</sup> He also stated that ‘until this county is opened up by railways and telegraphs, its resources cannot be known, nor can its industrious people get a fair field for their labours.’<sup>91</sup> The fact that almost half of the landscape was agriculturally poor and the building of roads in Donegal still in its infancy meant that travel at this time was long and difficult. West Donegal did not get its first surfaced road until 1834 and care of these Donegal roads was at times inadequate.<sup>92</sup> In a letter to the *Derry Standard* in 1893, a Letterkenny resident complained about the ‘impassable’ road between his home town and Stranorlar and felt that this was down to the fact that as ‘none of the Grand Jury reside in this district, there is no one to see that the work is right done (sic).’<sup>93</sup> One correspondent, writing in the *Derry Journal* the following year, felt that the coming of the railway to Killybegs meant that the roads in the area were being neglected and that the county surveyors were to blame as they usually hired the cheapest contractors and a proper job could not be done.<sup>94</sup>

Ireland’s first railway line was opened between Dublin and Kingston, nowadays known as Dún Laoghaire, on the south side of the country’s capital city in 1834.<sup>95</sup> The spread of the railway throughout Ireland was significant for sport as players, administrators and supporters could then travel further to participate in sport and at cheaper rates.<sup>96</sup> By 1860, Donegal was the only county in Ulster which ‘lacked a through main line.’<sup>97</sup> The development of sport in more southern counties such as Westmeath and Tipperary was helped by the fact that railway links between major cities ran through these counties.<sup>98</sup> Westmeath, for example, had a railway line east to Dublin by 1848 and west to Galway by

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<sup>90</sup>*DJ*, 8 Oct. 1886.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 4 Oct. 1886.

<sup>92</sup> MacLaughlin, ‘Introduction: The Making of a Northern County’, p.11.

<sup>93</sup>*DS*, 2 Oct. 1893.

<sup>94</sup>*DJ*, 2 March 1894.

<sup>95</sup>Cronin and Higgins, *Places We Play*, p.44.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>97</sup>Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, p.318.

<sup>98</sup>See Hunt, *Sport and Society*, pp. 8-9 and Patrick Bracken, ‘Foreign and Fantastic Field Sports’: *Cricket in County Tipperary* (Thurles, 2004), p.18.

1851.<sup>99</sup> As can be seen below in figure 1.3, in Donegal, the railway was slow to reach all areas and the county's coastal location meant that the railway stopped short of a number of more rural villages as there were no bordering western or northern counties. The first railway line in Donegal did not open until 1863 and was built to expand trading links in the east of the county. Strabane, County Tyrone, was already connected to Omagh, twenty miles east and to the principle town in Fermanagh, Enniskillen. It was from Strabane, lying on the border with the County Donegal village of Lifford and situated across the river Finn, that the Finn Valley railway line began and this followed the river in a western direction via Clady through the Donegal villages of Castlefinn, Liscooly and Killygordon before reaching the 'Twin towns' of Stranorlar and Ballybofey.<sup>100</sup>

On the final day of 1863, a line from Farland Point, on the edge of Lough Swilly in the Inishowen peninsula, was opened by the Londonderry and Lough Swilly railway company to improve trading with Derry city.<sup>101</sup> Although this was abandoned three years later, Buncrana, the main town of the region, and 'a fishing village and seaport of some importance' was linked to Derry by rail in 1864.<sup>102</sup> According to C.A. Clerkin, these connections with Derry city were highly significant as 'previously most of the business was conducted by sea in sailing ships as was prevalent in those days, but the more convenient and expeditious transport by rail very soon ousted many of these as it did also the horse drawn road transport of that time.' The fishing industry and the transport of whale blubber brought in from the Arctic were also improved as a result of this.<sup>103</sup> A line running south through

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<sup>99</sup>Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.9.

<sup>100</sup> Joe Begley, Dave Bell, Steve Flanders and Dave White (eds.), *The County Donegal Railway: A Visitor's Guide* (Leicester, 1996), p.4.

<sup>101</sup>Bell and Flanders (eds.), *The Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway*, p.5

<sup>102</sup> C.A. Clerkin, 'History of Public Transport in Donegal' in *Donegal Annual*, 1952, vol. 2, no. 2 (Ballyshannon, 1952), pp 405-17, p.407.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p.407.

Inishowen from Tooban Junction to Letterkenny was opened in 1883, further improving transport links.<sup>104</sup>

Development of the railway in the south and west of the county was a lot slower although by 1867, Bundoran was connected, through Ballyshannon, with Enniskillen in County Fermanagh by the Great Northern Railway.<sup>105</sup> As can be seen, the county initially lacked a singular railway company to cover all areas and problems with funding made development difficult. It was not until 1882 that a line from Stranorlar/Ballybofey, courtesy of the West Donegal Railway, was put in place to improve transport through Barnesmore Gap and the Blue Stack mountains to Donegal town in the south of the county.<sup>106</sup> However, this line stopped two miles short due to financial problems and was not completed until 1889 with the help of the Donegal Railway Station Company. Up until then, the remainder of the trip had to be completed by horse and carriage.<sup>107</sup> The County Donegal Railway line south to Ballyshannon was not finished until 1905.<sup>108</sup> Transport in the south-west was improved with financial assistance from the Congested District Board as the County Donegal Railway line into the fishing village of Killybegs was completed in 1893 and a line into Glenties from Ballybofey was finished in 1895.<sup>109</sup> In Inishowen, the Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway Company had extended the line from Buncrana further north through to Carndonagh by 1901.<sup>110</sup> The north-west of Donegal was, by 1903, served by the Letterkenny and Lough Swilly Railway which began in Letterkenny and wended towards the coast at Dunfanaghy Road before heading south-westerly with Burtonport its last stop.<sup>111</sup> Letterkenny and

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<sup>104</sup> Bell and Flanders (eds.), *The Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway*, p.7.

<sup>105</sup> Anthony Begley, *Ballyshannon and Surrounding Areas: History, Heritage and Folklore* (Ballyshannon, 2009), p.299.

<sup>106</sup> Begley, Bell, Flanders and White (eds.), *The County Donegal Railway*, p.4.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>110</sup> 'Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway' Retrieved as <http://www.irishrailwayana.com/pa206.htm> [Accessed 19 Oct. 2011]

<sup>111</sup> Bell and Flanders (eds.), *The Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway*, p.57.

Strabane were linked by 1909 which meant that villages with stations such as Convoy, Raphoe and Lifford could benefit from this.<sup>112</sup>

The development of the railway network in the county was a slow process mainly due to lack of finance, the physical nature of the county and priorities being given to what were deemed as more significant trading links. Therefore not every area could benefit from its presence. Proposals for the extension of lines to Ardara, Maas and Teelin in the south-west were unsuccessful while further north, attempts to have the railway reach Bunbeg and Carrigart amounted to nothing. The east coast of Inishowen similarly was not served by the railway.<sup>113</sup> The development of sport in many areas in the county was hampered by these delays and a number of areas remained isolated from important urban centres such as Buncrana, Letterkenny and Ballyshannon. It was the north-east, where the rail network was initially put in place, that was the hearth of Donegal's sporting activity in the nineteenth century and, as will be demonstrated later, the speed with which sporting clubs and associations developed was generally quicker there than in more isolated areas such as the south-west or west.

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<sup>112</sup>Bell and Flanders (eds.), *The Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway*, p.4.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*,







almost every aspect of life in the community.’<sup>114</sup> This position of power was to change, however, in the later decades of the century and this allowed Catholics to have a greater say in the running of society. The power enjoyed by the Tories and Liberals in Donegal politics had gone into decline in the 1880s and their grip on society was therefore weakened.<sup>115</sup> Donegal had been showing ‘signs of a growing popular nationalism since the mid-1870s’ and ‘the militant turn that the Land War took in 1884...led Catholics to insist that their demands be presented with greater vehemence and by public representatives who actually shared them.’<sup>116</sup> Clerical influence in Donegal society was illustrated in their organisation of the registration of voters in the 1885 elections. Desmond Murphy believes that ‘although the nationalists captured all four Donegal seats, real political influence now lay with a hardcore of politically active clergy.’<sup>117</sup> He has also stated that ‘the Land War was the major determinant of political change in Donegal’ as ‘it shattered the already declining influence of the landlord class on political life and substituted instead a popular democracy whose centre of authority was the Catholic clergy.’<sup>118</sup> Given the social dislocation experienced within the county in the late 1880s with the introduction of the Plan of Campaign (whereby tenants would pay their rent into an estate fund if the level of rent they decided on was rejected by the landlord) and the jailing of the socially influential Fr McFadden, it is perhaps unsurprising that the development of sport there was a slow process, as energy was directed elsewhere.<sup>119</sup> With Fr McFadden’s help, the plan was being implemented on ten estates in Donegal by 1888.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>John Tunney, ‘The Marquis, the Reverend, the Grandmaster and the Major: Protestant Politics in Donegal, 1868-1933’ in Nolan, Ronayne and Dunlevy (eds.), *Donegal History and Society*, pp 675-94, p.675.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 677.

<sup>117</sup>Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster*, p.148.

<sup>118</sup>Murphy, ‘The Land War in Donegal 1879-1891’, p.476.

<sup>119</sup>Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998*, p.134.

<sup>120</sup>Ó Baoighill, *Cardinal Patrick O'Donnell*, p. 42.

Despite the government's rejection of Gladstone's Home Rule Bills in 1886 and 1893, national administrative changes which were brought in gave Catholics a greater say in organising their affairs.<sup>121</sup> A series of land acts such as those introduced by Gladstone in 1870 and 1881, the Ashbourne Land Act of 1885 and Balfour's Land Act of 1896 were passed to give tenants improved rights, although it must be noted that landlordism in the Republic of Ireland was not finally removed until 1923.<sup>122</sup> The Local Government of Ireland Act of 1898 was intended 'to make local government more democratic' and 'within twenty years the total control that Protestants had enjoyed over the county's local and parliamentary politics had disappeared.'<sup>123</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter has stated that 'prior to 1898, local-government authority in Ireland had been confined to a Protestant elite' and the first elections held in 1899 gave 'an opportunity for more nationalist control and the practice of democracy on a scale never experienced before.'<sup>124</sup> Donegal society underwent a 'remarkable transformation' in the years between the Great Famine and the First World War and 'slowly, but relentlessly, Catholics began to replace Protestants as the influential and dominant faction in society.'<sup>125</sup> As Aiden O'Connell has stated, 'by 1911, Protestants were outnumbered in all four of Donegal's parliamentary constituencies, were divided between a mainly Presbyterian east and church of Ireland/Methodist south and could only count themselves in a marginal majority in six of the county's fifty-two civil parishes.'<sup>126</sup> This meant that those interested in the Gaelic revival and promoting Gaelic games were beginning to come to the fore and, as Jim MacLaughlin has stated, 'by the opening decade of the twentieth century a petty middle class of Catholic

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<sup>121</sup>Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998*, pp 446-7.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 444-7 and Ó Baoighill, *Cardinal Patrick O' Donnell*, p.29.

<sup>123</sup> Tunney, 'The Marquis, the Reverend, the Grandmaster and the Major', p.683.

<sup>124</sup>Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, pp 38-9.

<sup>125</sup>Tunney, 'The Marquis, the Reverend, the Grandmaster and the Major', p.684.

<sup>126</sup>Aiden O'Connell, 'The Ulster Covenant in Donegal, 1912' in Seán Beattie (ed.), *Donegal Annual: Journal of County Donegal Historical Society*, 2011, no. 63 (Letterkenny, 2011), pp 45-58, p.46.

farmers, businessmen and professionals managed to gain a foothold in Donegal's local political establishment.'<sup>127</sup>

This change in the governing of Ireland also had an effect on the identity of the county within Irish society. According to Mary E. Daly, it was the Local Government of Ireland Act in 1898 that 'restored the county as the major unit for local government, by creating elected county councils, and dividing each county into smaller units, urban district councils and rural district councils.'<sup>128</sup> The poor law unions had 'showed little regard for county boundaries' and the reform of local government marked an end to the political influence of the landlord class, and it ensured the transfer of local government from unionist to nationalist hands in all areas other than Ulster.'<sup>129</sup> Prior to this, grand juries, mainly consisting of unelected landlords, had been in charge of 'local infrastructure' while poor law boards looked after sanitation and welfare.<sup>130</sup> Daly also believes that as a result of the 1898 Act, 'the county survived, partly because an Act in 1888 had established elected county councils in England and Wales and the Irish legislation followed similar lines.'<sup>131</sup> While the All-Ireland Gaelic football and hurling championships had been contested on a county versus county basis since the 1880s, 'teams consisting of players from throughout the county did not become the norm until the early 1920s.'<sup>132</sup> Until then, in many cases, county selections were made up of the club which had won the county championship. As will be seen later, in Donegal not everybody was interested in supporting the GAA and a number of areas in the county remained disunited in their sporting choices.

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<sup>127</sup>MacLaughlin, 'Conclusion', p.364.

<sup>128</sup>Daly (ed.) *County and Town*, pp 7-8.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.

The effects of the Great War (1914-18), and the Irish Revolution, with the Easter Rising (1916), the War of Independence (1919-21) and the Civil War (1922-3) and their impact on the development of the GAA and other sports in Donegal, will be discussed in depth later in this thesis. Despite the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922, Donegal continued to remain on the outside of more national affairs throughout this decade and into the 1930s. As Jonathan Bardon has stated, ‘Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan became peripheral counties of a state which, after a ruinous Civil War, steadily loosened its last ties with the British Empire.’<sup>133</sup> MacLaughlin has stated that along with Donegal becoming ‘a peripheral region in an independent Ireland’, it was experiencing ‘a heightened degree of interaction with the outside world’ through seasonal migration and emigration in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>134</sup> In addition, ‘the county became an integral part of Catholic Ireland and was thus set apart from Unionist, “prosperous Ulster.”’<sup>135</sup>

As well as becoming more assimilated into ‘Catholic Ireland’, there were some important national changes which aided the growth of Gaelic games in the 1920s which had a significant impact on the growth of the GAA in Donegal at this time. The arrival of the new Garda Síochána force in Donegal town on 18 October 1922 was greeted by ‘a large number of townspeople who were on the platform when the train steamed in’ and the following day at mass, the Reverend P.J. Kelly ‘extended a welcome to the detachment of the Civic Guard, and said the people should assist them in the performance of their duties.’<sup>136</sup> These men were, according to Reverend Kelly, ‘policemen in the real sense of the word, not like the police under the old regime- a semi-military force.’<sup>137</sup> Already a sharp contrast was being drawn between the RIC and the Garda Síochána and this public approval from those with social

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<sup>133</sup> Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, p. 467.

<sup>134</sup> Jim MacLaughlin, ‘Donegal and the New Ireland’ in MacLaughlin (ed.), *Donegal: The Making of a Northern County*, pp 283-91, p. 283.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>136</sup> *DJ*, 20 Oct. 1922.

<sup>137</sup> *DJ*, 20 Oct. 1922.

influence like the Reverend Kelly meant that the law was beginning to be recognised in a positive manner. Added to this, RIC members had been banned from participating in Gaelic games and the GAA was now able to receive the input of a large body of men with significant social standing, and this will be examined in greater detail in chapter six.

Another important development in the 1920s was that transport improved. Statistical reports indicate that the number of private cars on Donegal roads increased from 9,246 in 1923 to 32,632 in 1930 and this meant easier access to GAA matches and sporting events.<sup>138</sup> While there was a general failure to extend the railway network to more rural areas within Donegal, the development of sport in the 1920s and early 1930s also benefited from the provision of buses to matches.<sup>139</sup> The impact of these changes on the development of a sporting infrastructure in the county will similarly be discussed later. Economic developments were slow, however. As late as the 1950s, ‘the lack of social and economic progress was particularly evident in the border counties of Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal.’<sup>140</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The key finding of this chapter is that industrial, educational, economic and transport structures were not in place in Donegal society to accommodate a widespread growth of sport in the late nineteenth century, as happened in many parts of Britain. Jim MacLaughlin has stated that ‘in Donegal, as in much of rural underdeveloped Ireland, schools and churches were agents for social and political change.’<sup>141</sup> There is little evidence that either of these establishments were interested in promoting sport in Donegal in the late nineteenth century. This was probably due to the poverty of the county and the fact that there were other social

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<sup>138</sup> *Saorstat na hEireann: Irish Free State Statistical Abstract 1931, Compiled by the Department of Industry and Commerce* (Dublin, 1931), p.158.

<sup>139</sup> See, for example, *DJ*, 15 July 1927 and *DP and TN*, 10 March 1934.

<sup>140</sup> Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, p. 588.

<sup>141</sup> MacLaughlin, ‘Conclusion’, p.364.

issues which warranted greater attention. The Land War and the Plan of Campaign also drew much energy away from the organisation of sport towards matters which were considered more important for basic survival in the 1880s. This chapter has also illustrated the regional variations which existed throughout Donegal. Donegal could generally be said to have been divided, economically, physically and culturally between east and west and, as a result of the geographical structure of the county and the Plantation of Ulster, there were vast discrepancies between the level of prosperity in these areas with East Donegal being more amenable to the development of sport. Allied to this, parts of the Laggan area such as Letterkenny were closely located to Derry city which was on the edge of Ulster's industrial region.

The loss of manpower through seasonal migration and emigration, combined with a lack of emphasis on education, further delayed the impact of the sporting 'revolution' in Donegal. While the introduction of Factory Acts had benefited the development of sport in England and in Belfast and Dublin, the effect of these in Donegal was minimal. Attitudes of local business people towards working hours also impeded the time available for leisure. Tranter has stated that improvements in transport in Britain meant that 'in most cases, the geographic and social range of participation (in sport) was extended.'<sup>142</sup> Donegal did not fall into this category as the levels of transport improvements in the late nineteenth century varied throughout the county. It was not until the latter decades of the nineteenth century that Catholics began to gain a greater say in society with nationalist successes in the 1885 elections, while the Local Government of Ireland act of 1898 changed the way society was being run. With the coming of the Garda Síochána in 1922 and transport improvements in this decade, the organisation of Gaelic games in Donegal was also strengthened. It is against the background of the late nineteenth century that the beginning of codified sport in Donegal

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<sup>142</sup>Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society*, p.34.

will be examined. The reasons why, despite the relatively backward state of development within Donegal society in comparison with parts of England, the organisation of matches, clubs and competitions did manage to go ahead will be addressed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2: Sport in Donegal in the nineteenth century

### Introduction

This chapter will illustrate the incompleteness of the early development of sport in Donegal through an assessment of when and how a number of clubs and governing bodies became institutionalised. As will be seen, while the development of sport was slow in comparison with some parts of England and Scotland, it was similar to trends in other Irish areas, such as Westmeath. There were a number of crucial differences, however, which affected the sustainability of these sports in both counties. The availability of transport, location and the levels of patronage available meant that developments in Westmeath were more reflective of those in Britain. As noted in the previous chapter, many of the factors which helped the spread of sport in some areas in mainland Britain were absent or poorly developed within Donegal society. The growth in popularity of team games such as soccer and cricket in Donegal in preference to more individual sports is similar to the pattern noted by Mike Huggins in his research of soccer in North-east England in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> While the East Donegal Cricket Union was formed in 1891 and the County Donegal FA was established three years later, there is no evidence that any governing body for rugby in the county was formed.<sup>2</sup> The reasons why soccer grew in popularity while rugby failed to attract popular support at the time will be addressed. Why cricket remained a minority sport and failed to attract significant support throughout the county will also be discussed. These sports will also be assessed in a national context using examples of other developments around the country. This chapter will show that it was in the north-east of Donegal where cricket and soccer developed quicker than in other areas in the county. As

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<sup>1</sup>Mike Huggins, 'The Spread of Association Football in North-east England, 1876-90: The Pattern of Diffusion' in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1989), pp 299-318, p.300.

<sup>2</sup> *DJ*, 29 April 1891 and 30 March 1894.



will also be seen, it was soccer which emerged as the most popular sport in the county by the early 1900s.

Some areas were particularly disadvantaged. The difficulties faced by those interested in hosting sport in certain areas of Donegal at this time were highlighted in a report of the Rosses Regatta, which was held in July 1876. Despite this event being deemed a success, ‘the remoteness of the locality, the sparseness of the population, the comparative absence of wealthy, influential gentlemen, and the difficulties in getting up popular amusements consequent on these drawbacks’ were all noted.<sup>3</sup> The county’s villages and towns were therefore not without their sporting activities and recreational traditions. In some areas, traditional versions of hurling continued until the early twentieth century. While the number of sports’ clubs in Donegal may not have been as great as in more urbanised areas in Ireland, local organising committees and villagers were able to take pride in their sporting events. Some of these competitions became annual affairs while in various areas they appeared sporadically or failed to emerge at all.

Prior to the organisation of soccer in the 1880s in Donegal, regattas, athletic events and horse racing were quite popular amongst Donegal’s communities, although cricket had been played since the 1860s. However, these earlier sports remained localised and lacked an overall county competitive structure. Regattas were an important social event around the coast and there are claims that these dated back as far as 1740 in one area of Donegal.<sup>4</sup> Infrequency characterised the hosting of these events. At the Fahan Regatta in September of 1871 it was reported that ‘it is a matter for surprise that this should be the first regatta ever

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<sup>3</sup>*DJ*, 24 July 1876.

<sup>4</sup>Simon McGeady, ‘Greencastle Regatta Website Goes Live in May’ Retrieved from <http://www.inishowennews.com/08GreenMemorable.htm> [Accessed 24 Sept. 2009] See also *DJ*, July 1876, 18 Aug. 1879 and 5 July 1880 for evidence of their local importance.

started at Fahan.’<sup>5</sup> In August 1878 it was noted after the Killybegs Regatta that ‘taking also into consideration the length of time since the last regatta was held, the interest taken in racing was on the increase.’<sup>6</sup> By August 1889 the Rosses Annual Regatta Committee could boast of having hosted their seventh annual regatta and it was claimed that ‘the regatta has now come to be a recognised holiday amongst all classes on the coast’ although regattas had been held in this area in 1874 and 1876.<sup>7</sup> Until more research is undertaken on the subject of regattas in Donegal and indeed in the rest of Ireland, it is difficult to draw comparisons with other areas.

Trinity College was the venue for Ireland’s first ‘modern athletic meeting’ in 1857 and ‘through the 1860s the notion of holding athletics meetings spread across Ireland’ but by the early 1880s, the organisation of athletics in Ireland was a mess. The Amateur Athletic Association, founded to govern British athletics in 1880, was beginning to gain control of athletics on the east coast and it was this state of affairs which lead Cusack to motion for the founding of what would become the GAA in 1884, with the rival IAAA being set up the following year.<sup>8</sup> Like other sports in Donegal in the 1880s, the organisation of athletics does not appear to have made any great administrative progress and there is little mention in the local press of any competitive structure for those with athletic aspirations. Athletic sports were held in many villages around the county and provided locals with a day out and the opportunity for competition.<sup>9</sup> However, these were also infrequent and were not held annually in every area. An exceptional case was the Cranford Athletic Sports. By July 1909, this event, carried along temperance lines, was said to be ‘the premier sports in North-west Donegal-perhaps one of the best rural sports in Ulster’ and the record crowd of ‘over two

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<sup>5</sup>*DJ*, 16 Sept. 1871.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 16 August 1878.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 August 1889.

<sup>8</sup>Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: A People’s History* (Cork, 2009), pp 16-9.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, *DJ*, 24 June, 1871, 10 April 1889, *DS*, 20 May 1893.

thousand people' was the largest recorded in over twenty-five years of the event, placing its origins in the early 1880s.<sup>10</sup> This event had the value of a number of athletic attractions, novelty races, a football competition and a band.<sup>11</sup> Local Kilmacrennan man Paddy Bearn was of the opinion that the Cranford Sports were 'one of the three days in the year that always provided a bit of crack. The other two were the May Fair in Kilmacrennan and the cutting of Johnny Boyce's turf.'<sup>12</sup>

Horse racing was another sport which was undoubtedly popular in Donegal prior to the twentieth century. However, until more extensive research has been undertaken of both eighteenth and nineteenth century sources the exact extent of its popularity and the years in which this sport was at its peak are difficult to establish. Like regattas, the consistency with which they were held appears to vary from village to village and probably depended on local enthusiasm and other factors such as patronage and the level of transport available. Horse racing still took place in a number of areas in Donegal in the latter decades of the century and these irregularly held events attracted much interest. In August 1866 the Buncrana Races took place having been 'revived' the previous year.<sup>13</sup> By July 1877 it was recorded that the Donegal town Races, held on the local Holmes Strand, had 'become a favourite and recognized amusement in this locality' while 'work was generally suspended' for the same event the following year.<sup>14</sup> Horse racing was well patronised in Ballyshannon area and the presence of an event there in 1792 has been noted.<sup>15</sup> This meeting was still being patronised in the 1890s and a report on the local races in October 1896 provides an extensive account of the involvement of prominent local men including the military, doctors, solicitors and justices

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<sup>10</sup>*DJ*, 5 July 1909.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*,..

<sup>12</sup> Hugh Strain, *In Kilmacrennan Long Ago* (Kilmacrennan, 1997), p.69.

<sup>13</sup> *DJ*, 4 Aug. 1866.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 July 1877 and 10 June, 1878.

<sup>15</sup> James Kelly, 'Horse Racing in Eighteenth Century Ireland' Paper Given at the Sixth Annual Conference of Sports History Ireland , 25 September 2010.

of the peace, some of whom had also been involved in the local cricket club.<sup>16</sup> Crossover of patrons between cricket and horse racing was also common in Ballybofey and Killygordon.<sup>17</sup> Again however it is difficult to say when horse racing reached its high point in Donegal but it seems to have been in decline by the 1890s.

In common with many parts of Ireland, of particular importance to a number of areas in the nineteenth century were pre-codified versions of hurling. Richard Holt has stated that ‘regulated and managed under the auspices of the Gaelic Athletic Association hurling along with ‘an caid’ or Gaelic football prospered mightily, providing the single most dramatic example of the powers of survival and adaption of ancient sports.’<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to establish exactly when football and ball and stick games were first played in Donegal although there is clear evidence of a variation of hurling engraved on the fifteenth century grave slab at Clonca near Carndonagh in the north of the county.<sup>19</sup> While ‘a stick-and-ball game, known variously as *iomáin*, hurling, ‘common’ (from *camán*) has been present in Ireland since at least the seventh century’, Eoin Kinsella similarly believes that ‘it is not possible to definitely trace the development of the game up to the late nineteenth century.’<sup>20</sup> Forms of folk football have been played in Ireland since at least the sixteenth century but tracing the growth of these up to the nineteenth century is also problematic, given the infrequent references which appear in law, poetry and contemporary publications.<sup>21</sup> In general, there is more evidence for the playing of pre-codified hurling in Donegal than forms of football in the nineteenth century and little has been recorded about the latter in the county. This may be, at least partially, because, as Kinsella has stated, early forms of football had an ‘anarchic nature, along with the

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<sup>16</sup>*Sport*, 10 Oct. 1896.

<sup>17</sup> See *DS*, 14 Oct. 1891 and 25 April 1892.

<sup>18</sup>Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford, 1989), p.70.

<sup>19</sup>Donal Campbell, Damian Dowds and Damian Mullan, *Against the Grain: A History of Burt, its People and the GAA* (Burt, 2000), p.70.

<sup>20</sup>Eoin Kinsella, ‘Riotous Proceedings and the Cricket of Savages: Football and Hurling in Early Modern Ireland’ in Mike Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse (eds.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association 1884-2009* (Dublin, 2009), pp 15-31, p.19.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

general perception that it was a less skilful or exciting game than hurling.’ This, he feels, ‘generally dissuaded poets and commentators alike from writing about football.’<sup>22</sup> Seán Beattie has noted that, along with camán, a type of football was played on the beach at Tremone Bay in Inishowen in the nineteenth century. He states that ‘one of the main events of the winter was the annual game of football played between the townlands of Ballyharry and Carrowmena on Christmas Day.’<sup>23</sup> This game was still being played in the late 1870s but evidence for this pastime in other areas around the county is scarce. The evidence for early forms of hurling will now be discussed as Donegal had a rich history of these ball-and-stick games prior to, and for a number of decades after, the founding of the GAA.

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<sup>22</sup> Kinsella, ‘Riotous Proceedings’, p.16.

<sup>23</sup> Seán Beattie, ‘Folklore and Customs in North-west Donegal’ in *Donegal Annual*, 2001, no. 53 (Letterkenny, 2001), pp. 44-9, p.45.



Figure 2.1: Areas where pre-codified forms of hurling were played in County Donegal, c. 1700s, 1800s. Sources: Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomana*, p. 644; Campbell, Dowds, and Mullan, *Against the Grain*, pp 73-6; Corry, Eoghan, 'The Mass Media and the Popularisation of Gaelic games, 1884-1934' in Dónal McAnallen, David Hassan and Roddy Hegarty (eds.), *The Evolution of the GAA: Ulaidh, Éire agus Eile* (Armagh, 2009), pp 100-11; Anthony Begley, 'The Liberator 1839: A Forgotten Ballyshannon Newspaper' in the *Donegal Annual* 2003, no. 55 (Letterkenny, 2003), pp 54-69; Mac a' Ghoill., 'Cross-country Hurling in Ardara' in *CLCG Ard a Ratha* (Ardara, 1980), pp 53-7; *DJ*, 1 Jan. 1897 and 29 Dec. 1899, *DV*, 14 Feb. 1902, *DP and DN*, 23 May 1903, 8 July 1905 and 27 Jan. 1906.

According to oral sources, pre-codified forms of hurling were played along the west coast of Donegal in Gortahork, Ardara, Glencolumbcille, Kilcar, Inver, Donegal town, Ballyshannon and Bundoran while it was also noted on Inishboffin island, Fahan and at Burt in the years prior to the founding of the GAA.<sup>24</sup> Newspaper references to the decline of commons in the parishes of Fanad, Newtowncunningham, Carrigart, Killybegs, Croagh and Glenties are generally non-descriptive but some do hint at an increased interest in more

<sup>24</sup> Liam P. Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomana* (Dublin, 1980), p.644.

modern forms of sport at the expense of commons.<sup>25</sup> There appears to be only a small amount of written evidence of pre-codified hurling in the county recorded in contemporary publications. An account by William Shaw Mason, recorded in 1816, highlights the activities of the lower classes which took place in the parish of Culdaff in Inishowen at that time:

Previous to Christmas, it is customary with the labouring classes to raffle for mutton, when a sufficient number can subscribe to defray the cost of a sheep; and during the Christmas holidays they amuse themselves with the game of kamman, which consists in impelling a wooden ball with a crooked stick to a given point, while an adversary endeavours to drive it in a contrary direction.<sup>26</sup>

The Ordnance Survey Memoirs recorded in the 1830s to accompany a town land survey of maps of Ireland for tax purposes also unfortunately provide little evidence about forms of hurling or football in Donegal. A statistical report taken by Lieutenant W. Lancey in May 1834 in the Inishowen village of Clonmany illustrated that ‘cock-fighting, hurling and dancing are declining. The game of common is still practiced.’<sup>27</sup> Lancey also noted that in Killygarvan, ‘the peasantry have no peculiar amusements or recreations’ while he was particularly scathing of the public’s lack of recreation in Mevagh when he stated that other than involvement in a horse-race on Rosapenna strands, ‘they are, like the rest of the country, not addicted to public sports. They appear either to have lost or never possessed a taste for feats of activity or manly strength, and all their leisure time is taken up in moping

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<sup>25</sup>See *DJ*, 1 Jan. 1897 and 29 Dec. 1899, *Donegal Vindicator*, (Hereafter referred to as *DV*) 14 Feb. 1902, *Derry People and Donegal News* (Hereafter referred to as *DP and DN*), 23 May 1903, 8 July 1905 and 27 Jan. 1906. A report on the Fanad Sports of 1897 mentioned ‘the good old days of twenty golden years ago when hurling or camán play was in vogue’ but failed to state why this ended. In 1899 it was stated that camán’s decline in Newtowncunningham may have been due to ‘the depopulation of the country or to the shooting proclivities of the young men of the district’ who had formed a rifle club. One Carrigart correspondent claimed in 1902 that ‘hurling and other old fashioned games, so dear to the lad of twenty years ago’ were long gone. The decline of camán was lamented by a Glenties writer in January 1906 who stated that ‘about twenty years ago all the men in our townland would repair either to the strand or some level field’ to play this game, although no reasons for its decline were given.

<sup>26</sup> William Shaw Mason, *A Statistical Account, or Parochial Study of Ireland, Drawn up from the Communications of the Clergy*, volume 2 (Dublin, 1816), p.160.

<sup>27</sup> Angelique Day and Patrick McWilliams (eds.) *Ordnance Survey Memoirs: Parishes of Donegal I 1833-5: North-east Donegal* (Belfast, 1997), p.17.

over misfortunes, real or supposed.’<sup>28</sup> Lancey’s accounts for the vast majority of parishes in Donegal at this time give the impression that forms of hurling were not widespread but this is at odds with the information recorded by the Folklore Commission.

According to this source, there were two main types of hurling played in Donegal. ‘Commons’ (camán), which was played on a restricted field, with the ball being struck along the ground, and the other type, cross-country hurling, which was more of a ball carrying game, took place across town lands.<sup>29</sup> In some areas, such as Ardara, Burt and Gortahork, both types were played. This was also the case in Derry, Antrim and Down as well as the southern counties of Offaly, Cork, Tipperary, Limerick and Clare.<sup>30</sup> Cross-country hurling was generally played in the winter as crops would have been damaged during the rest of the year while beaches were often used as a substitute for fields for the other type of game which could have been played on these at any time. This may partially explain the prominence of evidence for these games in more coastal areas in Donegal, although it was also played in inland counties.<sup>31</sup> Hurling played an important part in the social life of a number of villagers around the coast of Donegal in the days before these games became codified. While it is difficult to establish who these individuals were or who exactly was responsible for initiating their games, there is plenty of oral evidence of the type of social conditions and the various types of hurling played at this time. Storytelling was a popular form of entertainment in rural Ireland before the advent of radio and television and these stories would have been passed down from generation to generation, often being retold while ‘raking’, when the men of the neighbourhood would sit around the fire, smoking clay pipes.

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<sup>28</sup> Day and McWilliams (eds.) *Ordnance Survey Memoirs*, p.43 and p.60.

<sup>29</sup> Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomana*, p.644.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 437.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.,



Niall Ó Dufaigh has recalled that in his youth there were not many Sundays when hurling was not played on the beach at Magheraroarty. This would date these games back to the 1870s at least. The locals availed of the strands from Gortahork to Magheraroarty which stretched a distance of at least six or seven miles and were suitable even in times of snow and ice as the ground near the tide remained clear.<sup>32</sup> Both O'Dufaigh and Seosamh MacGrianna, who described events in Fanad, recall that fighting between locals and their neighbours was commonplace but games still took place every Sunday. Fights would be worse when strangers participated, of course.<sup>33</sup> Games were also played in the evening after work at Triagh a Locha and MacGrianna has noted the powerful striking ability of the bigger men.<sup>34</sup> In Teelin in the south-west of the county, games normally took place on level fields and after the hay was gathered in the autumn, hurling would frequently be played there until St Patrick's Day in March.<sup>35</sup> Ó hEochaidh believes that good playing fields were difficult to obtain in Donegal. Whatever fields they could get were always small as the bigger ones were needed for crops and divided into strips and it was also therefore more difficult to gain permission to use these. This was a trend which Ó Caithnia believes was also common in the south of Ireland.<sup>36</sup>

Art Ó Maolfabhail has noted a variety of balls used throughout Ireland. While the ball used in Donegal was generally known as a 'nagg' and made of wood, there were some differences further south as wood enclosed by leather was used in counties such as Clare and Limerick. The word 'sliotar', or 'hair ball', was also the name given to the ball in parts of Munster.<sup>37</sup> P.S. Mac a' Ghoill has stated that in Ardara, cross-country hurling was played

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<sup>32</sup> Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomana*, p.279.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.644.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.316.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.312.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.330.

<sup>37</sup> Art Ó Maolfabhail, *Camán: 2,000 Years of Hurling in Ireland: An Attempt to Trace the History and Development of the Stick-and-Ball Game in Ireland During the Past 2,000 Years* (Dundalk, 1973), p. 96 and figure IV.

with a ‘bool’ made of ‘briar-root, rounded under the embers of the turf fire until it was round and hard on the outside.’<sup>38</sup> Weighing half a pound or more, this type of ball was three inches in diameter and would generally last up to two months.<sup>39</sup> Cross-country hurling in Donegal was not dissimilar to ‘Hurling to the country’ which was played with a silver ball in Cornwall at the end of the sixteenth century although the ball was thrown rather than being struck by sticks.<sup>40</sup> ‘Hurling to goals’ was also popular in this area at the time.<sup>41</sup> A form of one handed hurling was said to be played in Rannafast on St Patrick’s Day before the coming of the Great Famine and this was thought to resemble a game of the same type which was played in Cambridge until 1885.<sup>42</sup>

In the parish of Cloughaneely, it was traditional for cross-country hurling to be played between town lands until nightfall on Christmas Day after a drop of poitín had been taken. This tradition is thought to date back to the middle of the eighteenth century. The object of the game was to keep the ‘cnag’ or ball in their own town land and bring it back from the place where they had originally met the opposition. The ‘cnag’ was about the size of a man’s fist and made of a hard substance, normally wood.<sup>43</sup> Christmas Day games in Cloughaneely would begin after dinner with an old person from the locality throwing in the ball. One side having won possession, a fast pursuit would then take place, sometimes in heavy snow, often over ditches, heights and rivers. Teams were also formed for games on a restricted area with goal scoring the aim. Hand and finger injuries were commonplace and players would at times swim up to their necks to secure the ‘cnag.’ In those days, travel from other parishes such as Dunfanaghy was extremely difficult over the mountainous terrain and the short hours of

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<sup>38</sup> Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomana*, p. 226 and Seamus J. King, *A History of Hurling* (Dublin, 1996), p.221.

<sup>39</sup> King, *A History of Hurling*, p.221.

<sup>40</sup> Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomana*, p.437.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>43</sup> Campbell, Dowds and Mullan, *Against the Grain*, p.74 and Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomana*, p.25.

daylight on Christmas Day would have rendered such a journey impractical, so these teams in Cloughaneely appear to have been restricted to town lands within their own parishes.<sup>44</sup>

Ó Dufaigh also recalled a Christmas tradition of hurling in Gortahork which is thought to date back to the 1740s.<sup>45</sup> These games unsurprisingly contained elements of pre-codified ball games in Britain as examined by Hugh Hornby.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes held on traditional dates around festival times, these mass games were often violent and had no referee or rule-book and were played through neighbouring areas. They were eagerly awaited and provided much excitement for the locality, usually taking place over town lands such as those in Ashbourne, Derbyshire and on the Orkney islands at Kirkwall, with drinking commonplace.<sup>47</sup> While these are still carried on today in a number of areas in Britain as part of annual traditions, pre-codified hurling is no longer played in Donegal. Neal Garnham has noted a similar decline of traditional sports in England with factors from the end of the eighteenth century, including industrialisation, urbanisation, a change in acceptable behaviour, improved law enforcement and the loss of patronage, from anxiety caused by the French Revolution, all influential.<sup>48</sup>

Ceilís or traditional dances were held in barns after some games and Ó Dufaigh has stated that this continued until the Great Famine of 1845-51; with the social dislocation, death and emigration this caused, the locals were not as hopeful and courageous afterwards and lacked the motivation to continue their games.<sup>49</sup> However, Elizabeth Malcolm believes this decline was in place in Ireland prior to the Great Famine and that ‘the change in the recreational pattern that occurred between the 1790s and the 1840s was drastic’ with the

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<sup>44</sup> Seán Ó hEochaidh, Christmas Day Traditions in Cloughaneely, MS932, Folklore Commission, 1943. pp 455-62.

<sup>45</sup> Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomana*, p.410.

<sup>46</sup> Hugh Hornby, *Uppies and Downies: The Extraordinary Football Games of Britain* (Swindon, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Hornby, *Uppies and Downies*, pp 8-17.

<sup>48</sup> Neal Garnham, ‘Sport and the State in Ireland: An Overview’ in *Leidschrift. Brood en spelen. Sports als kracht in de samenleving*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2008), pp 99-117, p.100.

<sup>49</sup> Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomana*. pp 411-12.

clergy ‘very much to the fore in the campaign to destroy popular religious practices.’<sup>50</sup> She has also stated that ‘prior to the Famine, the Irish found much of their recreation in religious and seasonal festivals.’<sup>51</sup> It seems that the famine was ‘the final blow’ to this decline which was already in place. As Alvin Jackson has noted, ‘it is clear that the Famine touched almost every aspect of Irish life in the mid- and late nineteenth century.’<sup>52</sup> Ó Caithnia has stated that the local priests and those involved in the Church were attempting to put a stop to the games as they felt the parishioners were becoming carried away with themselves.<sup>53</sup> The clergy had also put a stop to commons in Cinn Mhuaighe in County Antrim around 1835 and prohibited the playing of football in Rostrevor in County Down at the same time. In the latter case it was claimed that football was polluting the minds of the people.<sup>54</sup> In looking at the decline of the pattern festivals in Westmeath in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Tom Hunt believes that ‘the primary opposition of the Catholic Church was based on its belief that these events included many non-Christian features.’<sup>55</sup> Fighting and drunkenness would certainly have been part of the Christmas Day hurling games in Cloughaneely. Hunt is also of the opinion that ‘changes in the social structure of rural Ireland were accompanied by improved living standards and exposure to new cultural influences and new models of behaviour.’<sup>56</sup> In Ireland, as elsewhere, the Victorian forces of rational recreation were strong.

Ó Maolfabhail, Hegarty and McAnallen have noted that forms of traditional hurling continued to exist in Ulster ‘up to the eve of GAA’s birth and later’, particularly in Antrim

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<sup>50</sup>Elizabeth Malcolm, ‘Popular Recreation in Nineteenth-century Ireland’, in Oliver MacDonagh, W.F. Mandle and Pauric Travers, *Irish Culture and Nationalism 1750-1950*, pp 40-55, pp 46-7.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>52</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford, 1999), p.81.

<sup>53</sup> Ó Caithnia, *Scéal na hIomana*, p.563.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>55</sup>Tom Hunt, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: the Case of Westmeath* (Cork, 2007), p.217.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, pp 217-8.

and Down.<sup>57</sup> This was a similar trend in Donegal. Cross-country hurling failed to go into decline everywhere and it continued to be played in the village of Ardara until 1906. In one match in 1897, the playing field covered a distance of five miles, from Glengesh to Kilraine and the famous glaciated Glengesh pass was the setting for games between local farm workers between 1897 and 1906 which was exceptionally late for these games and illustrates that some areas were eager to carry on in the absence of a club structure.<sup>58</sup> The presence of traditional forms of hurling in an area did not necessarily lead to the formation of a club under GAA rules as these differed and needed to be demonstrated. Of the initial Donegal clubs which were affiliated to the Derry County Board in the period from 1888 until 1892, Burt was the only area mentioned by Ó Caithnia which went on to field a team in hurling competitions around this time.<sup>59</sup>

There is also strong evidence that the traditional game of camán continued to be played in Burt at least until the foundation of the GAA club there on 5 February 1888 with the visit of Derry club St Patrick's.<sup>60</sup> A hurling match was played using, for the first period of play, Burt's traditional camán rules and those of the GAA in the second-half and the Burt Hibernians GAA branch was formed afterwards.<sup>61</sup> This switching of rules at a half-way point was not uncommon in football matches in London in 1863 prior to the standardisation of a set of rules for association football in 1882.<sup>62</sup> Undoubtedly the Burt village's camán tradition was a significant factor in the interest behind the organisation of a GAA club. It was noted that the Burt men played throughout with camáns instead of hurleys, were barefooted and used their preferred 'nag', a wooden ball, for the first half. The match was played without

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<sup>57</sup> Art Ó Maolfabhail, Roddy Hegarty and Dónal McAnallen, 'From Cú Chulainn to Cusack: Ball-Playing, Caman, Shinny and Hurling in Ulster before the GAA' in Dónal McAnallen, David Hassan and Roddy Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA: Ulaidh, Éire agus Eile* (Armagh, 2009), pp 62-78, p.73.

<sup>58</sup> Mac a'Ghoill, 'Cross-country Hurling in Ardara', p.53.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, *DJ*, 28 Dec. 1888 and 28 Jan. 1889.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 Feb. 1888.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>62</sup> Matthew Taylor, *The Association Game: A History of British Football* (Harlow, 2008), p. 29 and Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915*, (Brighton, 1980), p.16.

sidelines and it appears that the home team were victorious.<sup>63</sup> Other areas noted in which traditional forms of hurling had been played failed to organise GAA clubs at this time although there is evidence to suggest that camán had also been played in Newtowncunningham, a club founded in 1890, prior to the founding of the GAA, but both these clubs appear to have learned hurling under GAA rules with the help of Derry clubs.<sup>64</sup> This instruction seems to have been crucial for making the switch from traditional hurling to that under GAA rules, and in areas such as West Donegal where camán had been prominent, the game died away in Magheraroarty, Gortahork, Falcarragh and Rannafast without the help of those familiar with the new GAA rules or simply those with an enthusiasm for promoting Gaelic games. Seasonal migration to Scotland may also have reduced the manpower available for these teams, as it increased towards the end of the nineteenth century, as noted in chapter one.

In the early twentieth century, in some cases where instruction could not be received, newly formed clubs simply continued with the traditional game. Ó Maolfabhail, Hegarty and McAnallen have stated that ‘the rapid propagation and popularisation of Gaelic football under GAA auspices from the 1880s onwards probably cemented the displacement of surviving camán and shinny traditions in most of Ulster.’<sup>65</sup> As will be seen later, the slow progress of Gaelic football in Donegal meant that camán continued to be played, along with hurling under GAA rules, after the formation of the county board in 1905 and was a more popular game than Gaelic football in many parts of the county, thereby illustrating how tradition can exist beside modernity rather than in opposition to it. Of the GAA clubs which were part of the Donegal County Board in 1905-7, only Brackey (Ardara), Burt, Croagh, Bundoran, Newtowncunningham and Fahan could be said to be areas where forms of hurling were

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<sup>63</sup> *DJ*, 8 Feb. 1888.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 Dec. 1899.

<sup>65</sup> Ó Maolfabhail, Hegarty and McAnallen, ‘From Cú Chulainn to Cusack’, p.78.

recorded prior to the founding of the GAA in 1884. In fact, elements of the traditional game of camán survived until 1906, but with the decline of the county board, they generally disappeared in Donegal.<sup>66</sup> However, this further illustrates the slow development of sport in the county. Seamus King believes camán went into decline mainly because the standard set of rules drawn up by Maurice Davin and unveiled by him at the third meeting of the GAA on 18 January 1885 were more similar to the southern game of iomain or báire.<sup>67</sup> Iomáin or báire, which was played in the summer, was another variation of hurling. It was played with ‘what would now be regarded as a typical hurley stick, the broad camán, and a softer ball of hair that might be lifted by the hand to be struck with the stick. The game needed a large area and might be played across country.’<sup>68</sup> As can be seen in the case of Donegal, this was a gradual decline and the majority of the 1905-7 clubs failed to take up iomáin. Their disbandment meant that no form of hurling continued to be played in the majority of villages in the county.

Association football or soccer was apparently not brought to Ireland until October 1878 with an exhibition match between Queen’s Park and Caledonians taking place in Belfast, although there have been earlier recordings of a game like soccer in Ireland. The Irish Football Association was not formed until two years later, some seventeen years after the English Football Association was founded.<sup>69</sup> As will be shown later, the establishment of an association for Donegal clubs was much slower and less permanent. While Alan Bairner and John Sugden have traced soccer’s origins in Ireland to the cross-country game known as Cad which was played over 1000 years ago, Mike Cronin believes that again it is hard to say ‘whether Cad and the other large scale folk football games are the precursor of what we now

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<sup>66</sup> Campbell, Dowds and Mullan , *Against the Grain*, p.87, and p.165 and *DP and DN*, 5 May 1906. Burt continued to use the camán in their play until the 1950s.

<sup>67</sup> King, *A History of Hurling*, p.219.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>69</sup> Neal Garnham, *Association Football and Society in Pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004), pp 4-5.

understand as soccer, or whether they form the basis of Gaelic football.’<sup>70</sup> Cad appears to have been a ball carrying game, the ‘ball’ being an inflated animal bladder, and according to Edmund Van Esbeck gained its name from the ‘the scrotum of the bull.’<sup>71</sup> Eoin Kinsella believes that ‘‘folk’ or ‘traditional football’ had been played in Britain since at least medieval times, and it is reasonable to assume that the game spread to Ireland long before the seventeenth century.’<sup>72</sup> While the founding of the English Football Association in 1863 was significant, there is strong evidence to suggest that ‘sophisticated and organised forms of popular football pre-dated the creation of the FA and were arguably as influential.’<sup>73</sup>

While football clubs of various codes in England were in operation as early as 1855, those in Donegal were not founded until the early 1880s.<sup>74</sup> The reasons for the popularity of soccer around this time have been explained by Tony Mason and these included the simplicity of the rules and the lack of equipment, physical strength and expense needed by players, and the fact that any number of players could take part in a variety of places. In addition to this, he wrote that ‘football has, and had, that combination of spontaneity and order which allowed scope for individuality and unpredictability within an organised, disciplined, context.’<sup>75</sup> Despite claims that ‘soccer was first introduced to Donegal in the Rosses in 1889-90, a few years after the formation of Glasgow Celtic’, forms of this code were certainly being played in Donegal by the early 1880s. The *Derry Journal* noted football ‘under the association rules’ being played between the villages of Castlefin in East Donegal and Croaghan of West Tyrone in July 1881, although this match contained elements of folk-

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<sup>70</sup> Mike Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity Since 1884* (Dublin, 1999), pp 118 -9.

<sup>71</sup> Edmund Van Esbeck, *One Hundred Years of Irish Rugby: The Official History of the Irish Rugby Football Union* (Dublin, 1974), p.12.

<sup>72</sup> Kinsella, ‘Riotous proceedings’, p.16.

<sup>73</sup> Taylor, *The Association Game*, pp 30-1.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28. The Sheffield Football Club appears to have been the first of these in 1855.

<sup>75</sup> Mason, *Association Football and English Society*, p. 1.



football.<sup>76</sup> These players paid little attention to the timeframe as the game began at four o'clock in a 'best of three' series and continued until half past eight in the evening 'when it was unanimously agreed to draw owing to the lateness of the evening' despite the fact that Castlefin had scored one goal.<sup>77</sup> Gambling was an important part of the day's proceedings. It was claimed that 'much interest was manifested on both sides pending the result, and several bets were made.'<sup>78</sup> Some of these early matches varied in the playing time and the number of players used. The 'amateur clubs' of Doaghbeg and Rossnakill played a friendly match in Drumnacraig 'on an elegant stretch of sand banks beautifully situated on the western shores of Lough Swilly' located on the property of Hugh Doherty in February 1885.<sup>79</sup> This thirteen a-side unspecified football match lasted for around three hours and it was reported that 'every available foot of vantage ground was occupied.'<sup>80</sup> The fact that there was a 'strict observance of the regulations pertaining to the game' and that 'clubs' were now in operation illustrates how the game was now being taken more seriously.<sup>81</sup>

Soccer also formed part of athletic clubs' meetings and locally held annual competitions during this decade. Patronage was a crucial element of these early matches. In January 1882, the Letterkenny Athletic Club availed of the generosity of the Hegarty ladies of the local hotel who granted them their field for 'a well-contested match' between two local selections.<sup>82</sup> In June 1885 at the annual Cranford Athletic Sports, Kerrykeel FC, described in 1891 as 'an old established club', defeated Cranford FC in a football match played 'under association rules' in Cranford Park, then the property of the Earl of Leitrim.<sup>83</sup> According to

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<sup>76</sup> *DJ*, 25 July 1881.

<sup>77</sup> Dick Duffy, 'The Growth of Soccer in Letterkenny' in *Letterkenny and District Christmas Annual 2011* (Letterkenny, 2011), pp 42-4, p.42. See *DJ*, 25 July 1881 for what appears to be the first reference to the playing of association football in the county.

<sup>78</sup> *DJ*, 25 July 1881.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 Feb. 1885.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 Jan. 1882. See also 9 Aug. 1882.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 June 1885 and 23 Dec. 1891.

Neil Tranter, 'for upper and middle-class patrons and participants sport was often a means of either flaunting social status or enhancing popularity and reputation, and, in some cases, even of securing electoral support.'<sup>84</sup> In July 1886 the Kerrykeel soccer club held their annual Athletic Sports under the supervision of farmer Patrick G. Green, in a field owned by Mr Laird, whom it was claimed, had 'always been most anxious to aid the members of the club' and the well-attended entertainment concluded with 'a general game of football.'<sup>85</sup>

Association football matches were also being played in the south of the county with teams representing Donegal town and Mountcharles meeting in February of 1882.<sup>86</sup> James Walvin has noted the growth of English clubs such as Sheffield Wednesday and Preston North End from existing cricket clubs.<sup>87</sup> While cross-over from cricket to soccer took place in Irish counties such as Westmeath, there is little clear evidence that this took place in Donegal although it is likely that it was not uncommon.<sup>88</sup> A cricket club had been set up in Ballyshannon in April 1882 and, the season having ended around September, a number of these prominent locals were also involved in the organisation of a soccer club in the town for the 1882-3 season.<sup>89</sup> However there is no evidence that this club played any matches. The number of soccer teams in Donegal began to increase in the early 1890s. By 1891 there were at least seventeen in the county and this figure had more than doubled by the following year.<sup>90</sup> This illustrates a significant growth from the handful of teams noted by the middle of the previous decade.

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<sup>84</sup>Neil Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), p.56.

<sup>85</sup>*DJ*, 23 July 1886.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 1 Feb. 1882.

<sup>87</sup>James Walvin, *The Only Game: Football in our Times* (Harlow, 2001), p.33.

<sup>88</sup>Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.183.

<sup>89</sup>*DJ*, 24 April 1882. See also *DS*, 22 May and 14 Oct. 1895. In 1895, Carrigans FC's officials had also been part of the local cricket club earlier that year.

<sup>90</sup>In 1891 the *DV* and *DJ* contained a number of references to three clubs in Rathmullan and two each in Castlefin, Letterkenny, and Bundoran. Buncrana, Kerrykeel, Milford, Ramelton, Cranford, Ballyshannon, Ardara and Nairn were all able to field teams that year. Clubs recorded the following year included Castlefin, Doohan, Letterkenny FC, Kerrykeel FC, Carradoan, Golan, Milford Harps, Milford Swifts, Boyleagh Champion Kilclooney AFC, Castlefin Wanderers, Castlefin Young Stars, Ramelton, FC, Ramelton Sunbursts, Cranford

Significantly for the development of this code in the north-east, local clubs benefited from their close location to Derry in the spread of soccer. The Derry FA was established in April 1886 and their competitions provided some experience for a number of clubs in North Donegal in the early years of the next decade.<sup>91</sup> Donegal had no football association at this point and a number of its north-east clubs looked to Derry for assistance in the diffusion of soccer into their areas, demonstrating the strong pull of Derry, as a major conurbation, for many in rural Donegal. This help was at first given through the playing of exhibition matches. The spread of soccer in Buncrana, Letterkenny and Ramelton in the early 1890s was aided by teams from Derry.<sup>92</sup> Participation in leagues and cup competitions was also encouraged and this gave Donegal clubs their first experience of competitive matches. Buncrana took part in the County Derry Challenge Cup in October 1890 and by November 1891, both Ramelton FC and Letterkenny FC had affiliated to the County Derry FA and were in the draw for the junior cup.<sup>93</sup> In 1894, seven North-east Donegal clubs were affiliated with the Derry based North-West FA.<sup>94</sup> The development of the game was also promoted by visiting ships crews such as those of the HMS Aurora and HMS Jason and military teams such as the Royal Engineers who challenged local clubs in the Lough Swilly area in the 1890s.<sup>95</sup> Donegal clubs' lack of success in Derry competitions led to the formation of the County Donegal FA in Ramelton on 24 March 1894.<sup>96</sup> The north-east Donegal clubs of Cranford, Cratlagh, Ramelton Athletic, Kerrykeel, Buncrana, Letterkenny, Swilly Rangers and Milford Swifts were all in the draw for the Donegal Cup in September 1894 along with Derrybeg Celtic from Gweedore in the north-west and this illustrates a desire for competitive

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Athletics FC, The Rivals (Letterkenny), Volunteers (Letterkenny), Ray Shamrocks, Tyrconnell Swifts, Buncrana FC, Sea View, Carrick, Glenree, Rathmullan, Craig, Carradoan Fr Matthew FC, Dungloe FC, Kincasslagh Shamrocks, Dungloe Swifts, Millview, Ramelton United, Bridge End Celtic, Moville FC, Kilraine Grand Rapids FC, Manorcunningham FC and St Adaman's Swifts.

<sup>91</sup> *DJ*, 7 April 1890.

<sup>92</sup> See *Ibid.*, 26 Sept. 1890, 21 Oct. 1891, 4 March 1892 and 28 April 1893.

<sup>93</sup> *DJ*, 17 Oct. 1890 and *DS*, 30 Nov. 1891.

<sup>94</sup> *DJ*, 9 Mar. 1894.

<sup>95</sup> See *DJ*, 3 Oct. and 29 Oct. 1894 and 16 March 1898.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 Mar. 1894.

matches under their own governing body.<sup>97</sup> At this point, part of the bedrock of soccer in the county had been laid down, and as will be seen later, Gaelic football struggled to penetrate this area to the west of Lough Swilly. There is little evidence as to how the majority of these north-east clubs were founded. It appears that most Donegal soccer clubs were simply village or town combinations which got together, perhaps through social or work networks.

The Donegal FA relied heavily on the work of individuals. The main instigator was Daniel Deeney, a national school teacher and honorary secretary of Carradoan FC.<sup>98</sup> He was supported by other secretaries such as clerk, P.G. Green of Kerrykeel FC and Joseph Devenney of St Adaman's Swifts.<sup>99</sup> While the Donegal FA was met initially with enthusiasm, the league and cup competitions did not receive enough public support and matches were poorly advertised. The physical barrier of the Blue Stack Mountains also meant that those in the south of the county were somewhat isolated from this centre of soccer activity. Travel was also difficult, as noted in a report of a friendly between Cranford and Derrybeg Celtic in May 1895. It was claimed that Cranford were 'heavily hampered by the long journey and playing so soon after arrival.'<sup>100</sup> The transport network meant that clubs from other areas outside the north-east, with the exception of Derrybeg Celtic, Kincasslagh Shamrocks, Ardara Emeralds and Donegal Celtic, failed to join up. The resignation of Daniel Deeney in 1896 was also a blow.<sup>101</sup> Internal disputes and the failure of a number of prominent clubs to acknowledge the rules meant that the Donegal FA could not develop in a successful manner and was disbanded in 1898.<sup>102</sup> Financially the organization struggled and failed to install a proper method of collecting admission fees at matches, something which Metcalfe has

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<sup>97</sup> *DJ*, 19 Sept. 1894.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 Mar. 1894.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 and 16 Mar. 1894.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 May 1895.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 Mar. 1896.

<sup>102</sup> See for example, *Ibid.*, 25 March, 22 Nov. 1895 and 3 June 1896.

identified as being the determining factor in whether a soccer club would flourish or deteriorate.<sup>103</sup>



Figure 2.2: Location of clubs affiliated to the County Donegal Football Association, 1894-5. Source: *DJ*, 19 Sept. 1894.

This organisation of the Donegal FA was rather slow in comparison with the foundation of football associations in some counties of England but until more research is undertaken on the development of those in Ireland, an accurate comparison is difficult. While the English and Sheffield football bodies were the first to be organised, the number of county and district associations was already increasing in the 1870s and early 1880s.<sup>104</sup> Ireland differed vastly from this where the development of similar bodies by 1890 was initially restricted to Belfast (IFA), Down, Antrim and Derry while a Mid-Ulster Association was also

<sup>103</sup> *DJ*, 3 June 1896 and Alan Metcalfe, 'Football in the Mining Communities of East Northumberland', in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 5, no. 3 (1988), pp 269-91, p.279.

<sup>104</sup> Taylor, *The Association Game*, p.39. The Sheffield FA was founded in 1867.

in operation.<sup>105</sup> The Leinster FA was founded in 1892 while the Munster FA was formed in 1901.<sup>106</sup> This growth of soccer in Donegal was certainly much quicker than in Kerry, where soccer was not played until 1894 and remained a minority sport at this time.<sup>107</sup> Although the Donegal FA lasted for only four years, the county therefore may not have been as slow to develop a football association in comparison with those outside of Ulster and clearly benefited, at least initially, from this regional influence. However, it failed to develop after this early promise, illustrating the difficulties in the spread of sport throughout Donegal. By the middle of the opening decade of the twentieth century, between them, the Leinster and Munster FAs could boast of having seventy clubs affiliated to the IFA, while Donegal's involvement in this national governing body was limited to less than a handful of clubs.<sup>108</sup> This contrasted greatly to the growth of soccer in many parts of mainland Britain, where, as Matthew Taylor has noted, regional bodies in Lancashire, Birmingham, Northumberland and Durham, Sheffield, Nottinghamshire and Stirlingshire all experience significant rises in affiliated clubs and players in the late nineteenth century.<sup>109</sup> In Donegal, the number of soccer clubs and teams noted in the local press in 1905 (thirty-two) was actually less than the figure of thirty-five for 1892, which illustrates the slow development of this code after an initial spurt in the early 1890s.<sup>110</sup> As will be seen later, the failure to develop a permanent structure for soccer for all of Donegal meant that Gaelic football gained popularity in the 1920s in a number of areas there.

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<sup>105</sup> Garnham, *Association Football and Society*, p.5.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp 5-6.

<sup>107</sup> Richard McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom: The Establishment and Development of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Kerry, 1884-1924', unpublished Ph.D thesis, University College Dublin, 2011, p.89. Soccer was not introduced in Kerry until 1894 and only six matches involving Kerry teams were played in the 1890s. McElligott also states that the game was largely restricted to foreign employees and the military within the county in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

<sup>108</sup> Irish Football Association Minute Book 1903-1909, Council Meeting, Belfast, 9 Oct. 1906.D/4196/A/2. p. 165

<sup>109</sup> Matthew Taylor, *The Association Game: A History of British Football*, (Harlow, 2008), p. 39.

<sup>110</sup> See appendix nine.

A number of south-west soccer clubs were formed in the 1890s as a result of muscular Christianity, which was the belief that ‘physical activity played a crucial role in developing Christian gentlemen.’<sup>111</sup> By the end of August 1891, a soccer club had been set up in Ardara as a result of the need to provide a sports clubs for local youths.<sup>112</sup> Killybegs Emeralds were organised in August 1896 by the local parish priest Fr John Sweeney and a number of local businessmen ‘for the benefit of the youth of the town and parish.’<sup>113</sup> Political involvement led to the formation of the Boyleagh Champion FC in Kilclooney on 1 February 1892, with a number of those prominent in the local branch of the Irish National League behind this foundation.<sup>114</sup> Neal Garnham has stated that clubs had their origins in a range of existing sporting and social establishments.<sup>115</sup> However, unlike clubs in the east of Ulster and England, there is limited evidence that any teams were founded in Donegal from pubs or the church. Evidence for those with their origins in educational establishments is also difficult to find but a team representing St Eunan’s Seminary in Letterkenny were in existence in 1895 and Ramelton Polytechnic affiliated to the Donegal FA the following year.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, evidence of clubs formed in the workplace is difficult to trace. This is probably down to the lack of industry in the county at the time although a club representing Convoy Mills were affiliated to the County Donegal FA for the 1897-8 season.<sup>117</sup>

Seasonal migration to Scotland from West Donegal contributed significantly to the popularity of soccer in this area with returning locals instrumental in setting up teams there

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<sup>111</sup> Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.174.

<sup>112</sup> *DV*, 1 May and 4 Sept. 1891.

<sup>113</sup> See Moira Mallon, ‘Killybegs Emeralds’ in *Dearcadh: The Ardara View 1996-7* (Letterkenny, 1996), pp 52-3, p.52 and *St Catherine’s FC Profile* in *The Donegal Post*, 5 March 2008. Railway workers from Derry are said to have brought soccer to Killybegs a few years prior to this foundation.

<sup>114</sup> *DJ*, 5 Feb. and 24 Aug. 1892. Dungloe Swifts and Kincasslagh Shamrocks met in a return match at Cruit Island on 21 Aug. 1892. This appears to be the first reference in the local press to a match in the West Donegal area.

<sup>115</sup> Garnham, *Association Football and Society*, p.45.

<sup>116</sup> *DJ*, 20 March 1895 and 14 Oct. 1896.

<sup>117</sup> *DJ*, 11 Feb. 1898.

having had experience of the sport in Scotland.<sup>118</sup> Joseph M. Bradley has stated that ‘in the second-half of the nineteenth century the growth of soccer was swift as it pervaded and was taken up by communities all over Britain including by the Irish who were firmly situated within the country’s working class.’<sup>119</sup> Although there is evidence that a club, ‘only a short time started’, was in existence in Dungloe by June 1892, it is unclear if there was any links to Scotland in this foundation.<sup>120</sup> Keadue Rovers was formed in April 1896 by brothers, Maurice and Con Campbell who had played for St John’s of Perth.<sup>121</sup> The Keadue team participated in matches against other local sides such as Cruit, Kincasslagh, Braide, Annagry, Mullaghduff, Maghery, Marameeelan, Arranmore, Gweedore and Kincasslagh Shamrocks around this time.<sup>122</sup> Soccer became firmly enrooted in these areas in the 1890s. While more research is needed on seasonal migration as a driver of the dissemination of soccer in Ireland, it appears West Donegal was not unique in this respect. The growth of soccer in Achill Island, which lies off the coast of Mayo, can also be attributed to seasonal workers, although it seems this took place in the 1940s and 1950s and these young men worked in England as well as Scotland.<sup>123</sup>

Patrick Bracken has noted the presence of soldiers as being significant in the initiation of soccer into society in Tipperary in 1897.<sup>124</sup> Military involvement was also crucial to the game’s development in Ballyshannon in South Donegal. A detachment of the locally based 2<sup>nd</sup> Dorset Regiment provided the inspiration for the founding of a number of clubs in

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<sup>118</sup> For an assessment of the impact of soccer and Glasgow Celtic on Irish immigrants in Scotland see Joseph M. Bradley, ‘Football in Scotland: A History of Political and Ethnic Identity’ in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1995), pp 81-98 and ‘Integration or Assimilation? Scottish Society, Football and Irish Immigrants’ in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1996), pp 61-79.

<sup>119</sup> Joseph M. Bradley, *The Gaelic Athletic Association and Irishness in Scotland* (Argyll, 2007), p.50.

<sup>120</sup> *DJ*, 15 June, 1892.

<sup>121</sup> Derek Doherty, ‘The History of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Donegal’, unpublished M.A. thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 1998, p.27.

<sup>122</sup> Ben O’Donnell, *The Story of the Rosses* (Letterkenny, 1999), p.382.

<sup>123</sup> ‘Achill Rovers History-The early years’ Retrieved from [http://achillrovers.com/achill\\_rovers\\_history\\_early\\_years\\_dooiver\\_swifts\\_hm](http://achillrovers.com/achill_rovers_history_early_years_dooiver_swifts_hm) [Accessed 2 Sept. 2012]

<sup>124</sup> Bracken, ‘Foreign and Fantastic Field Sports’, p.115.



the area during 1896.<sup>125</sup> Erne FC were said to be the first of these, their players clearly coming from the local neighbourhood composed, as they were, ‘mainly of young men on the port side of the water.’<sup>126</sup> As Mason has noted, ‘many football teams in many places must just have been set up by groups of young men who just lived close to each other.’<sup>127</sup> By April 1897 interest had spread to more outlying areas near Ballyshannon as it was stated that ‘football is not now confined to the towns, for it has spread far and near, and matches have been taking place between town lands from Doobally mountain to Kildoney.’<sup>128</sup> With the failure of the Donegal FA, the organisation of soccer in Donegal was restricted to inconsistently arranged, localised cup competitions until the 1930s. Despite this, by 1905 there were thirty-two teams and clubs in the county and this greatly outweighed the number of those active in any other sport.<sup>129</sup>

Early attempts to establish rugby in the county failed to have any major impact. Founded in 1854, Trinity College, Dublin was the first rugby club to be organised in Ireland. Students attending English public schools had helped establish the game there and by 1879 the Irish Rugby Football Union had been formed to govern the whole country’s rugby affairs. Ten Ulster clubs were affiliated to this union in 1885 while the remainder were made up of clubs from Leinster (nine) and Munster (seven). A year later a Connacht branch was set up.<sup>130</sup> It is difficult to establish when the first rugby match was played in Donegal but a number of rugby clubs in the south of the county were up and running by the late 1880s. A rugby club

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<sup>125</sup> *DV*, 19 Feb. 1897. Other teams noted in the *DV* in the Ballyshannon area that year included Ballyshannon Swifts, Coolmore, Kilbarron, Bright Stars, Lisahully, Cashelard, Cashel Heroes and Doobally.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>127</sup> Mason, *Association Football and English Society*, p.31.

<sup>128</sup> *DV*, 30 April 1897.

<sup>129</sup> See appendix 9. This information has been compiled using the *DJ*, *DV* and *Donegal Independent* newspapers. (Hereafter referred to as *DI*)

<sup>130</sup> ‘IRFU history’ Retrieved from [http://www.irishrugby.ie/300\\_285.php](http://www.irishrugby.ie/300_285.php) [Accessed 25 Aug. 2009]

had been founded in Donegal town in 1887 under the captaincy of Townsend Gahan.<sup>131</sup> Donegal's participation in matches appears to have been limited to friendly games against opposition such as local club Ballintra, although they did attract external opposition such as Foyle College from Derry in the spring of 1892.<sup>132</sup> The Ballintra club appears to have had a strong military influence. By 1889 the club was playing under the name of the Ballintra Fusiliers and they believed they owed their defeat in the 23 January match against Donegal to the absence of their captain and founder, Lieutenant John Thompson of the 59<sup>th</sup> Regiment.<sup>133</sup> Two months later they were in action again against Big Park Blazers in a match which 'lasted for nearly two hours' and 'much interest was shown in the game by the people of the neighbourhood.'<sup>134</sup> There is little evidence of any further growth and development of these three clubs, although in 1890 Donegal participated in friendlies against local teams Brownhall, Ballintra and Laghey.<sup>135</sup> The lack of a nearby competitive administration was no doubt detrimental to these clubs' development.

Ballyshannon society in the latter decades of the twentieth century also had a strong Protestant influence with many of these people involved in the organisation of local clubs such as those of cricket, lawn tennis and hunting.<sup>136</sup> A rugby team did not exist in Ballyshannon until 1898, when it was organised by James Sproule Myles, despite some efforts in October 1889 to initiate a club.<sup>137</sup> It was noted that 'one of the greatest difficulties in the way of carrying on rugby is the numbers of players required...in a town the size of Ballyshannon it is almost impossible to raise a sufficient number.' An attempt was also made

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<sup>131</sup> *DJ*, 22 Sept. 1893. See also Brian Hoban, 'Muriel Gahan (1897-1995) Retrieved from <http://towns.mayo-ireland.ie/WebX?14@213.BPtFe4YwNNr.0@.ee7a78d> [Accessed 25 Aug. 2009] Gahan, a member of the Church of Ireland and a Freemason, was later an inspector for the Congested District Board.

<sup>132</sup> *DS*, 4 and 18 March 1892.

<sup>133</sup> *DI*, 2 Feb. 1889.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 March 1889.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 Jan. and 29 March 1890 and *DJ*, 21 March 1890.

<sup>136</sup> See for example, *DV*, 12 April 1890, 15 April 1892 and *DI*, 6 Sept. 1884.

<sup>137</sup> *DV*, 2 Nov. 1889 and 28 Oct. 1898. Myles, a Presbyterian, was a merchant's son and later played rugby for Ireland. He went on to become a successful TD.

to disseminate the rules through this newspaper.<sup>138</sup> There is no evidence that Myles maintained his interest in developing rugby in the town in the 1900s having returned from abroad.

Writing in 2003, David Hassan stated that today ‘rugby, with the exception of a small number of clubs in Donegal and Monaghan, has virtually no tradition in any of the three (Ulster) counties located south of the border.’<sup>139</sup> Rugby did not develop in Donegal as it did in other areas in Ulster, and Hassan believes that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, ‘in spite of its growing popularity, rugby continued to be seen as the almost exclusive preserve of one section of the Irish people.’<sup>140</sup> Hassan is in agreement with Sugden and Bairner who claim that ‘some nationalists were attracted to the game, but the vast majority were not and the development of rugby depended to a huge extent on the participation of Protestants or, at the very least, those who identified with the Union.’<sup>141</sup> Certainly rugby in Donegal failed to challenge association football at the end of the 1800s and there was further competition from those interested only in playing Gaelic games in the twentieth century. Despite the introduction of the game in County Westmeath by two graduates of Trinity College, it was never taken on by the civilian population and Hunt has identified a number of factors for this, these being an absence of opposition, lack of a rugby-playing army regiment and the failure of the game to capture the public’s imagination.<sup>142</sup> Some of these reasons were evident in Donegal too. Unfortunately for the diffusion of sport in Donegal, as noted, second-level education was practically non-existent in the nineteenth century although there were some efforts to promote the sport of rugby by 1895 in the Royal School at Raphoe, which had

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<sup>138</sup>DV, 28 Oct. and 18 Nov. 1898.

<sup>139</sup>David Hassan, ‘Rugby Union, Irish Nationalism and Nationality in Northern Ireland’ in *Football Studies*, vol. 6, no.1 (2003), pp 5-18, p.15. At the beginning of April 2012, Donegal’s rugby clubs were located in Letterkenny, Ballyshannon, Donegal town, Carrickfinn, Carndonagh and Stranorlar.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., pp 10-1.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p.11.

<sup>142</sup>Hunt, *Sport and Society*, pp 174-6.

been established as part of the five Royal schools in 1608.<sup>143</sup> This introduction of rugby was rather late in comparison with the Royal School in Dungannon which attracted the Trinity Second XV in 1867.<sup>144</sup> Fixtures involving The Royal School, Raphoe, such as those against Derry Academy in 1895, and Foyle College the following year, appear to have been friendly matches.<sup>145</sup> It is unclear if they managed to compete in the Ulster Schools' Cup, something which would probably have helped their development. Given the importance of the education system in the spread of sport in Ireland, the failure of the Royal School, Raphoe, to establish a strong rugby tradition was not conducive to the development of the sport in Donegal.<sup>146</sup> While Liam O'Callaghan has also noted the importance of those with education in disseminating the game, he believes that this sport was 'at a significant cultural distance from rural Ireland at this time.'<sup>147</sup> This was probably also the case in Donegal, where as, mentioned, efforts to introduce rugby were limited to those in the south of the county and these failed to attract the interest of those outside a concentrated area close to Ballyshannon.

Neal Garnham has traced the first recorded cricket match in Ireland back to August 1792 between the Garrison and All Ireland selections in Phoenix Park.<sup>148</sup> However cricket was slow to spread to the rest of Ireland. The first Irish club, Phoenix CC in Dublin, was not founded until 1830.<sup>149</sup> There were clubs playing 'irregular matches' in Galway, Kilkenny, Wicklow and Dublin in that decade but it was not until the early 1870s that there were cricket clubs in every county in Ireland.<sup>150</sup> Little research has been undertaken on the growth of clubs in Donegal or their location, players, competitions and administrative structures. A history of St Johnston CC was published in 2001 but the development of this sport in Donegal lacks a

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<sup>143</sup> DS, 22 Nov. 1895.

<sup>144</sup> Hassan, 'Rugby Union', p.10.

<sup>145</sup> DS, 18, 25 Nov., 18 Dec. 1895 and 2 March 1896.

<sup>146</sup> Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: A People's History*, (Cork, 2009), p.13.

<sup>147</sup> Liam O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster: A Social and Cultural History*, p.28.

<sup>148</sup> Neal Garnham, 'The Roles of Cricket in Victorian and Edwardian Ireland' in *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2009), pp 27-48, p.28.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>150</sup> Garnham, 'The Roles of Cricket in Victorian and Edwardian Ireland', pp 28-9.

general overall history.<sup>151</sup> Until a future extensive study of cricket in Donegal is undertaken, it is difficult to establish exactly how many games were played annually, and when cricket activity was at its peak. However, it was not until the 1890s that the game took on a competitive structure in the county which suggests an improvement in organisation and interest in this decade, but like the Donegal FA, this establishment lacked any significant permanency.

Cricket in Donegal appears to have spread through the east of the county in the Laggan Valley. It is clear that a small number of Donegal clubs were involved in local competitions while some others were affiliated to cricket bodies based in Derry. The majority of clubs seem to have been mainly involved in friendly matches. Certainly the military in the county was involved, but the social background of club members varied and was not always of an elitist nature. Cricket was being played in Raphoe by 1864 and in 1892 this club was identified as the oldest established club in the county.<sup>152</sup> Gerard Siggins has established that there were clubs in counties Derry and Tyrone prior to this and the spread of the game was helped by the railway network.<sup>153</sup> As mentioned above, the Finn Valley Railway line had been established in 1863 and this seems to have eased the spread of cricket in this area. It was not long before the sport was beginning to develop, with teams recorded in Lifford, Finn Valley and Donaghmore and at the Royal School in Raphoe in 1865. There was also a club in the north of the county at Malin that year.<sup>154</sup>

Tranter has noted that cricket in Stirling suffered from poor organisation, 'a lack of explosive excitement and a refusal to make itself more attractive to spectators.'<sup>155</sup> While

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<sup>151</sup> William Platt, *History of St Johnston Cricket Club, 1939-2000* (Coleraine, 2001).

<sup>152</sup> *DS*, 22 June 1892.

<sup>153</sup> Gerard Siggins, *Green Days: Cricket in Ireland 1792-2005* (Gloucestershire, 2005), p.36.

<sup>154</sup> Begley, Bell, Flanders and White, *The County Donegal Railway*, p.4. See *DJ*, 10 May, 5 Aug., and 2 Sept. 1865 for references to these teams.

<sup>155</sup> Neil Tranter, 'The Chronology of Organized Sport in Nineteenth- century Scotland: A Regional Study.II- Causes', in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 7, no. 3 (1990), pp 365-87, p.384.

organisation was definitely a problem in Donegal, other difficulties were more localised. The physical divisions created by the Derryveagh and Bluestack mountains undoubtedly hindered the spread of cricket to the west of the county. Difficulties with transport were illustrated in the reports of the Falcarragh, Swilly and County Donegal cricket clubs who saw this as being detrimental to their development in the 1870s while in 1890, the clubs of Ballybofey and Ballyshannon agreed to meet in Donegal town as the distance between these clubs was deemed to be too great to allow either to host the match.<sup>156</sup> South Donegal clubs such as Ballyshannon were therefore generally restricted to matches against more local opposition.<sup>157</sup> It was in the more prosperous East Donegal that the majority of the county's cricket clubs were formed and this introduction took place earlier than in the west.

Despite cricket being played in the Royal School in Raphoe they probably would have had to look outside the county for schools' opposition due to a dearth of local schools and this did not help the spread of cricket in Donegal.<sup>158</sup> By 1870 there were four teams based in Letterkenny- Swilly, Letterkenny, the County Donegal CC and the Letterkenny military barracks all had practicing elevens, while Castlefin, Finn Valley and Ballybofey were also participating in friendly matches.<sup>159</sup> The County Donegal XI was strong enough to defeat a Derry selection at Letterkenny in September of that year in a fixture reputed to be the first ever county match to be played within Donegal.<sup>160</sup> A year later the game had spread to the south of the county where it was being played by the Donegal CC.<sup>161</sup> In the north-west there

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<sup>156</sup> See for example, Swilly CC in *John Lawrence's Handbook of Cricket in Ireland, Number Seven, 1871-2* (Dublin, 1872), p.150; Falcarragh CC in *John Lawrence's Handbook of Cricket in Ireland, Number Eight, 1872-3* (Dublin, 1873), pp 133-4 and Co.Donegal CC in *John Lawrence's Handbook of Cricket in Ireland, Number Twelve, 1876-7*(Dublin, 1877), p. 100 and *DJ*, 25 July, 1890.

<sup>157</sup> See for example, *DJ*, 19 and 29 May, 2 June, 5 and 17 July, 14 and 30 Aug. 1882. Ballyshannon CC took part in matches against H Company Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, Enniskillen CC, Donegal CC, Mountcharles CC and North Leitrim CC that year.

<sup>158</sup> Helen Meehan and Godfrey Cass, *Tracing Your Donegal Ancestors* [Second edition] (Dublin, 2008), pp 99-100.

<sup>159</sup> In 1870 these teams were all noted in the *DJ*.

<sup>160</sup> See *DJ*, 4 Oct. 1870 and *John Lawrence's Handbook of Cricket in Ireland, Number Six, 1870-1* (Dublin, 1871), p.137.

<sup>161</sup> *DJ*, 12 Aug. 1871.

were two teams in the parish of Cloughaneely, with the Olphert family, who were the local landlords, prominent in the founding of the Falcarragh club in 1870.<sup>162</sup> Not every Donegal cricket club was listed in *John Lawrence's Handbook of Cricket in Ireland*, which is a useful guide to the game, but is considered incomplete as it relied on clubs sending their information to Lawrence.<sup>163</sup> There were no Donegal entries in this publication until 1871 and only a small number of Donegal clubs sent their returns in that decade, these being the Co. Donegal CC, Swilly and Falcarragh, and after the 1875 edition, the Co. Donegal CC was the only one which decided to correspond. These clubs do not appear to have survived into the 1880s and exactly how much activity Donegal's other cricket clubs were involved in throughout the 1870s is difficult to establish.

Development of clubs in the west, south-west and south was slower than in the north-east and was characterised by a lack of permanency. This is unsurprising given their distance from the hearth of cricket in the county. By May of 1881, a new club had been established in the south of the county at Mountcharles, numbering 'about forty members.'<sup>164</sup> Donegal CC defeated a team from Glenfin in September.<sup>165</sup> A club was set up in Ballyshannon in April 1882.<sup>166</sup> The Donegal and Ballyshannon clubs were temporarily discontinued in this decade and re-appeared again after a few years' inactivity with emigration being cited as a problem for the former club.<sup>167</sup> In West Donegal, there were three clubs in the Rosses area in 1885, and in the south-west there was a club in Ardara in 1891.<sup>168</sup> These four clubs received scarce attention in the local press which suggests they did not exist for very long. Cricket outside East Donegal failed to gain a competitive infrastructure and the contrasting

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<sup>162</sup> *DJ*, 26 Aug. 1871.

<sup>163</sup> Garnham, 'The Roles of Cricket in Victorian and Edwardian Ireland', pp 29-30.

<sup>164</sup> *DJ*, 23 May 1881.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 Sept. 1881.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 April, 1882.

<sup>167</sup> See *DI*, 16 March 1889 and *DJ*, 8 April 1882.

<sup>168</sup> See *DJ*, 24 April and 10 July 1885 for references to Burtonport, Dungloe and Rosses CC. See *DI*, 9 Oct. 1891 for Ardara CC.

economic and social conditions undoubtedly contributed to this. The lack of an organiser or committee to arrange fixtures and a cup was also a major problem.

Lack of motivation, perhaps caused by a dearth of new opposition, was said to have been a problem for the Falcarragh CC in 1874.<sup>169</sup> The club played six matches in 1872 and again in 1873, against Letterkenny, Dunfanaghy and the Co. Donegal XI, and only seven members of their club put in an appearance for their away match against Letterkenny in the latter year.<sup>170</sup> Given that they only had three clubs to play against, it must have been difficult for their forty members to maintain an interest throughout the season. With the wet weather, some Donegal clubs were fortunate if they could participate in ten matches per season. The Co Donegal CC played nine matches in 1877 and ‘the wet summer’ was said to have been a factor in this low number.<sup>171</sup> This is a small number of matches when compared to some of the more flourishing clubs such as Belfast club North of Ireland who in 1878 could boast of playing thirty-one matches. This club had 380 members and Donegal membership figures are relatively low in comparison.<sup>172</sup> The securing of playing fields also hindered the development of some clubs. The Swilly club felt that their low number of three matches in 1871 was primarily due to ‘not getting a proper ground early in the season.’<sup>173</sup> Difficulties in securing an adequate field were a recurring problem for the Ballybofey club and in 1892 they complained bitterly in the *Derry Standard* about the doubling of the price of rent by a local landowner and seem to have been relatively inactive that year having passed a resolution repudiating ‘the conditions as insulting.’<sup>174</sup> However, most clubs appear to have

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<sup>169</sup> *John Lawrence’s Handbook of Cricket in Ireland, Number Nine, 1873-4* (Dublin, 1874), p.122.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>171</sup> *John Lawrence’s Handbook of Cricket in Ireland, Number Thirteen, 1877-8* (Dublin, 1878), p. 105.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>173</sup> *Lawrence’s Handbook of Cricket in Ireland, Number Seven*, p. 150.

<sup>174</sup> See *DS*, 27 May 1892 and *DJ*, 20 March 1908 and 20 May 1912. In March 1908, the club appealed to supporters for help in securing grounds.



been able to obtain fields when necessary, despite having to cope with poor surfaces and uneven creases at times.<sup>175</sup>

By 1891 there were at least eleven cricket clubs in Donegal. The East Donegal Cricket cup competition, under the presidency of Dr William E. McFeeters, was first played for that year, being held on a knock-out basis between the clubs of Convoy, St Johnston, Raphoe, Manorcunningham, Lifford and Ballybofey.<sup>176</sup> Lifford were awarded this trophy outright in 1893 having won three in a row and it appears there were no competitions held in 1894.<sup>177</sup> Despite this competitive structure, the spread of cricket in the area did not seem to have benefited. The fielding of non-locals by clubs was said to be a problem. Of concern to ‘the Gawk’ in 1891 was that ‘the union was established for the purpose of promoting cricket in East Donegal, and not that a club might return the name of some ‘crack’ who perchance might happen to be in the neighbourhood during the cricket season.’<sup>178</sup> Attendances at meetings were said to be poor and not every club kept up to date with their arranged fixtures, while some teams suffered from a lack of members.<sup>179</sup> In 1895 it was replaced by the County Donegal Cricket League with Mr Alexander Weir, manager of the Convoy Woollen Factory, as secretary.<sup>180</sup> Thirty matches were organised for the six teams involved. Again these teams were all located in the Laggan Valley area. This time St Johnston and Ballybofey did not take part but were replaced by Clonleigh and Letterkenny, and Convoy were victorious.<sup>181</sup>

The league does not appear to have been a very successful enterprise and appears to have disbanded after 1897.<sup>182</sup> Despite the lack of development made by cricket’s administrative bodies the number of teams playing in Donegal does not appear to have

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<sup>175</sup> See, for example, *DJ*, 26 July 1890.

<sup>176</sup> *DJ*, 29 April 1891.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Oct. 1895.

<sup>178</sup> *DS*, 11 Sept. 1891.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 June, 27 July and 15 Aug. 1892.

<sup>180</sup> *DJ*, 12 June 1895.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Oct. 1895.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 May 1897.

diminished by 1900 as there were at least thirteen cricket teams in the county that year.<sup>183</sup> Significantly twelve of these were located in the north and east of the county. Like soccer and GAA teams, a small number of clubs were eager to affiliate to external committees. In 1903 Buncrana were registered with the County Derry Cricket Union.<sup>184</sup> Other clubs such as Ballybofey and Clonleigh became affiliated with the North-west Cricket Union in this decade but a gradual decrease in overall numbers meant that in 1914 Buncrana were the only Donegal club noted as competing in the North-west Senior League, along with clubs from Derry and Tyrone.<sup>185</sup>

Those playing cricket in Donegal also faced criticism from nationalistic journalists in the local press in 1908.<sup>186</sup> According to Mike Cronin and Roisín Higgins, the Land War and the coming of the GAA had a detrimental effect on cricket and ‘many culturally minded Catholics abandoned the game. Cricket retreated into an even smaller number of social settings where the game’s imperial ties were not seen as problematic.’<sup>187</sup> The lack of a county-based structure was detrimental to its overall development while the Great War also had a serious effect on the progress of the game.<sup>188</sup> Cricket in Donegal failed to develop any widespread support throughout the county in the twentieth century and its popularity remained largely restricted to the Laggan Valley area. Like cricket in Westmeath, it continued to exist and in 1928 the East Donegal Cricket league was revived.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> In 1900 the *DJ* noted teams in Inishowen at Buncrana, Malin, Culdaff and Moville; Carrigans, Clonleigh, Convoy, St Johnston, Letterkenny, Raphoe, Churchill and the Royal School in Raphoe in the east; and in the south at Mountcharles.

<sup>184</sup> *DJ*, 31 July 1903.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 July 1907 and 10 June 1914.

<sup>186</sup> *DI*, 21 Aug. 1908.

<sup>187</sup> Mike Cronin and Roisín Higgins, *Places We Play: Ireland’s Sporting Heritage* (Cork, 2011), p.35.

<sup>188</sup> Seán Reid, ‘The Place of Irish Cricket in the Nineteenth Century British Empire of Cricket.’ Paper given at the Sixth Annual Conference of Sports History Ireland, 25 Oct. 2011.

<sup>189</sup> *DJ*, 3 Aug. 1928. St Johnston, Convoy, Ballybofey, Letterkenny, Raphoe and Urney (Tyrone) were all involved.

In examining the development of sport in Westmeath between 1850 and 1905, Tom Hunt has stated that ‘such was the commonality of interest between the leading elements of society that developments in Westmeath were similar in many instances to UK-wide recreational and sporting developments.’<sup>190</sup> Although it is not possible to trace the dates of institutionalisation of every sport in County Donegal as this thesis aims to focus mainly on the first fifty years of the GAA, it can be stated that some sports were slower to be organised than in Westmeath but others actually began earlier. As can be seen in table 2.1, soccer was first played there in 1881 as opposed to 1887 in Westmeath while hurling in Donegal predated that in Westmeath by fourteen years. A lawn tennis tournament was held in Ballyshannon in September 1883 while this sport was not introduced into Westmeath until the following year.<sup>191</sup> Athletics, with the help of the military, were also held in Donegal in 1871 as opposed to 1877.<sup>192</sup> Coursing was being organised by the Rockhill coursing club in 1892 and again this suggests an earlier introduction.<sup>193</sup> Golf was also being played in Donegal prior to its introduction in Westmeath with clubs existing in Rosapenna and Lisfannon by 1891.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup>Hunt, *Sport and Society*, pp 253-4.

<sup>191</sup>*DJ*, 17 Sept. 1883.

<sup>192</sup>*Ibid.*, 24 June 1871.

<sup>193</sup>*Sport*, 30 Jan. 1892.

<sup>194</sup>‘Rosapenna Hotel & Golf Resort’ Retrieved from <http://www.rosapenna.ie/history.php> [accessed 2 Nov. 2011] and ‘Launch of Historical Golf Book’ Retrieved from [http://www.donegaldemocrat.ie/lifestyle/launch\\_of\\_historical\\_golf\\_book\\_1\\_3177016](http://www.donegaldemocrat.ie/lifestyle/launch_of_historical_golf_book_1_3177016) [accessed 2 Nov. 2011]

Table 2.1: Comparison of introductory dates of sport in counties Westmeath and Donegal.

<b>Sport</b>	<b>Date of introduction in Westmeath</b>	<b>Date of introduction in Donegal</b>
Angling	1885	<b>Unknown</b>
Archery	1833	<b>Unknown</b>
Athletics	1877	1871
Badminton	1895	<b>Unknown</b>
Coursing	1896	1892
Cricket	1852	1864
Croquet	1894	<b>Unknown</b>
Cycling	1882	1895
G. Football	1885	1889
Golf	1892	1891
Hockey	1892	c. 1898
Hunting	1854	<b>Unknown</b>
Hurling	1902	1888
Lawn tennis	1884	1883
Polo	1881	<b>Unknown</b>
Racing	1731	<b>Unknown</b>
Rowing	Pre-1850	1740
Rugby	1879	1887
Soccer	1887	1881
Table tennis	1901	<b>Unknown</b>
Yachting	c.1770	1740

Sources: Information on Westmeath has been taken from Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.319. For dates of introduction of sport in Donegal see *DS*, *DJ*, *DV*, *DI* and *Sport* newspapers.

This would suggest that Donegal was not so slow to organise clubs and competitions in comparison with other Irish counties. Although rates of development were certainly slow in comparison with the Scottish area of Stirling, where a wide variety of sports clubs and events were in existence by the 1870s, Tranter's assertion that 'the development of organised sport was far from steady' could also be applied to developments in Donegal.<sup>195</sup> While dates for the organisation of hunting and horse racing in Donegal are unclear, it must be noted that

<sup>195</sup> Neil Tranter, 'The Chronology of Organized Sport in Nineteenth-century Scotland: A Regional Study. I-patterns' in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1990), pp 183-202, p.201.

a wider variety of sports were available in Westmeath with little evidence that archery, polo, croquet and badminton were formally organised in Donegal in the nineteenth century. This may reflect Westmeath's more prosperous state at the time and the significant influence of its gentry and 'big house' residents on the organisation of sports such as tennis and croquet.<sup>196</sup> As noted earlier, the transport network was also more effective in Westmeath. Most sports in Donegal lacked a uniting administrative board and activity was often restricted to local initiations, often depending on the enthusiasm of individual clubs and the amount of nearby teams to interact with. Sport happened, but in Donegal the small number of clubs, matches and meetings hampered its development, spread and sustainability. Sports in Westmeath such as lawn tennis, croquet and cycling appear to have had stronger networks and the presence of many of those with high standing in society and therefore enjoyed a greater sustainability.<sup>197</sup> Until more information is available on other Irish counties, a proper nationwide contrast cannot be made although variations are likely to exist.

Many of the problems behind the slow development of sport in Donegal stemmed from Donegal's failure to industrialise and develop secondary and third-level educational at this time while its slow evolution of transport and communications networks were also a major hindrance. As Mike Cronin has stated, in the late nineteenth century 'the absence of modernising forces across most of Ireland meant that many of the social and economic changes, which would empower the sporting 'revolution' in Britain, were absent.'<sup>198</sup> These factors generally impacted only on the more urban east coast areas and, as Paul Rouse has noted, increases in population in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Belfast and Dublin meant that these cities in particular 'experienced a change which drew them away

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<sup>196</sup>Hunt, *Sport and Society*, pp 75-86.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., pp 75-112.

<sup>198</sup>Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland*, p.103.

from the rhythms of rural Ireland and closer to those of English cities.’<sup>199</sup> He also believes that ‘in the Irish countryside....the fall in population and the relative failure to industrialise did not prove inimical to sporting development’ and has noted the case of Westmeath as being fundamental to this argument.<sup>200</sup>

Within Donegal itself, there was some particularly obvious regional variations between areas where early attempts to develop sport took place in the late nineteenth century. As noted, Donegal was physically divided through the middle and this also made a significant contribution to social and cultural divisions in sport. As seen above, initial attempts to institutionalise sport first took place in the north-east area located close to Derry city, with the East Donegal Cricket Union, founded in 1891 and the County Donegal Football Association (1894) catering mainly for clubs in this region.<sup>201</sup> These were not a success. Cultural boundaries and the difficult physical terrain also meant that efforts to include clubs outside this area were usually not given much significance by administrators and received scarce attention at meetings. Networking amongst soccer clubs was generally poor and, after the collapse of the County Donegal FA in 1898, cup competitions remained restricted to clubs within reasonable travelling distance of each other. There is no indication that, for example, any north-east soccer clubs attempted to enter competitions in other areas such as Ardara which organised the Evans Cup (1906-7). Competitive sport generally remained localised and attempts to bring in or unite a wider sporting community throughout the county were generally unsustainable. Cup soccer ceased, albeit temporarily, in 1915 and these localised competitions, which were held mainly in the south and south-west at this stage, failed to arouse much support outside their local areas. Attempts in the north-east to organise league

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<sup>199</sup> Paul Rouse, ‘Sport and Ireland in 1881’ in Alan Bairner (ed.), *Sport and the Irish: Histories, Identities, Issues* (Dublin, 2005), pp 7-21, p. 8.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>201</sup> *DJ*, 29 April 1891 and 30 March 1894.

and cup competitions were few and far between until the middle of the 1920s.<sup>202</sup> The organisation of transport to national sporting events such as IFA Cup Final and the All-Ireland Gaelic football and hurling finals attracted scarce attention in the local press, further illustrating Donegal's isolation from these more urbanised events.

The north-east area was, as noted, part of Derry's cultural hinterland and differed significantly from the impoverished west and south-west of the county. However, it would be incorrect to assume that a sporting 'revolution' took place there, the critical factor being the failure of these institutions to be sustained as by 1900 there were no local, or county-based governing bodies in charge of the administration of sporting competitions in the county. National and regional bodies struggled to impose themselves and penetrate deep into Donegal despite efforts from those involved in sporting administration in Derry city to cater for Donegal's north-east GAA and soccer clubs in the late nineteenth century. Similarly there were no attempts made in Donegal to form governing bodies for Gaelic games, rugby or athletics in the late nineteenth century. Certainly at a macro-level, a number of national governing bodies for sport were founded in Ireland along a similar timeframe to those in England, as shown above.<sup>203</sup> However, the lack of impact of these developmental agencies on the spread of their respective codes in Donegal highlights the county's general reliance on individuals in the development of sport there in the late nineteenth century, and this continued for much of the twentieth century's opening two decades.

At first glance the north-east's Laggan area may look ripe for the accommodation of a sporting 'revolution'. It was more agriculturally fertile and commercially prosperous than areas along the West Donegal coast and had gained a basic railway network prior to its arrival

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<sup>202</sup> A rare exception in the north-east after 1898 was the Burnfoot FA cup which was held in 1903 and 1904 but failed to attract the support of teams involved in the County Donegal FA. See *DJ*, 29 June 1903 and 24 June 1904.

<sup>203</sup> Neal Garnham, 'Accounting for the Early Success of the Gaelic Athletic Association' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol.34, no. 133 (2004) pp. 65-78, p. 65.

in the west and south-west, but the level of industry there paled in significance to more densely populated areas such as Derry city.<sup>204</sup> By 1902 there were thirty-eight factories in Derry, with outworkers in rural Inishowen finding a source of employment in the 113 rural stations. While this urban centre certainly had an impact on the development of sport in north-east Donegal, its economy declined around the turn of the century.<sup>205</sup> As Jonathan Bardon has noted, ‘the city reached an economic plateau in the first years of the twentieth century, partly because great liners ceased to call to the port and partly owing to mounting competition facing the shirt-making industry. Derry at this point was also ‘beginning to share some of the economic decline experienced by much of the province west of the River Bann.’<sup>206</sup>

The Laggan Valley also lacked a network of second-level educational establishments which would have benefited the spread of sport and there is no evidence that the Royal School in Raphoe placed any great emphasis on sporting achievement. Major towns in the north-east such as Letterkenny and Ballybofey failed to increase in population between 1841 and 1911 with Bundoran in the south of the county noted as one of ‘only five growing towns in the Western half of Ulster’ along with Cookstown, Omagh, Derry and Strabane.<sup>207</sup> In addition, the population of East Donegal’s electoral area decreased from 45,417 in 1891 to 39,643 in 1911.<sup>208</sup> East Donegal’s elected politicians in the latter decades of the nineteenth century failed to show much interest in promoting sport in the area, although it must be noted that defeated candidates such as E.T. Herdman and Captain Stoney at times acted as

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<sup>204</sup> This is not to be confused with the Lagan Valley area near Lisburn in East Ulster where linen manufacturing was prominent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

<sup>205</sup> Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* [Updated edition] (Belfast, 2001), p. 396.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p.397.

<sup>208</sup> B.M. Walker (ed.), *Parliamentary Results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), p.341.



patrons.<sup>209</sup> Additionally, it could be stated that the ‘degrading’ work experience of seasonal migrants was such that it led to divisions within the county.<sup>210</sup> One priest stated that the hiring fairs where children and teenagers were picked up for labour were like ‘slave markets’ and Desmond Murphy has stated that ‘the real impact of the Laggan lay in the creation of a distinctive and embittered youth in West Donegal.’<sup>211</sup> This, he believes was a result of ‘the unrelenting toil of the work’ and ‘the entrenched anti-Catholicism of the strong tenant farmers in the area.’<sup>212</sup>

The lack of heavy industry and resources such as coal in the Laggan Valley was sufficient to necessitate the organisation of three Co-operative creameries there in the late 1890s and Pat Bolger has stated that even in that area ‘the appearance and dress of the farmers and their farm labourers (in tied cottages) were hardly indicative of any great degree of affluence.’<sup>213</sup> In comparison, the growth of soccer in East Northumberland, while not without its difficulties, was helped by the coalfield’s concentrated region which had a population in 1901 of 89,920 and a total of sixty-six villages within ‘an area of approximately twenty by seven miles’ and the close proximity of Newcastle which ‘dominated the area in both an economic and political sense.’<sup>214</sup> The area covered in Mike Huggins’ study of soccer across the north-east of England was ‘a large and diverse region with heavy industry and urban development along the Tyne, Wear and Tees, two separate coalfields in Durham and Northumberland, and ironstone mining in Cleveland, co-existing with large rural areas.’<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Walker, *Parliamentary Results in Ireland*, p. 341 and see, for example, *Derry Standard*, 14 April 1893. Herdman gave a ‘generous subscription’ to the Raphoe Cricket Club while Captain Stoney was thanked for the use of the grounds in his demesne.

<sup>210</sup> Desmond Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster, 1790-1921* (Derry, 1981), p. 228.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>213</sup> Pat Bolger, ‘The Congested Districts Board and the Co-Ops in Donegal’, in William Nolan, Liam Ronayne and Mairead Dunlevy (eds.), *Donegal History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County* (Dublin, 1995), pp 649-71, pp 649-57.

<sup>214</sup> Alan Metcalfe, ‘Football in the Mining Communities of East Northumberland, 1882-1914’ in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 5, no. 3, (1988), pp 269-91, p. 270.

<sup>215</sup> Mike Huggins, ‘The Spread of Association Football in North-east England, 1876-90: The Pattern of Diffusion’ in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 6., no.3 (1989), pp 299-318, p. 299.

Neil Tranter has stated that ‘the successful initiation and subsequent early development of a modern sporting culture required more than an environment suitable in terms of income levels, amounts of leisure time, and production, transport and communication methods.’<sup>216</sup>

Patronage was therefore seen as an essential part of the development of sport in the Central Scottish area of Stirling. This was a lowland region lying within a ‘fifteen to twenty mile radius of the town of Stirling’ and it took in ‘a rich diversity of economic, social and demographic conditions, ranging from the predominantly rural economy of districts to the north and west of the town...to the more varied economy to the south and east.’<sup>217</sup> Although taking in a much smaller area than Donegal, this may actually sound similar in terms of its economy. However, some parts of the Stirling area combined agriculture with ‘extensive mining, manufacturing and commercial activity’ and significantly, ‘between 1821 and 1900 the total population of the region rose from 122,180 to 231,358.’<sup>218</sup> The level of infrastructure in society appears to have been crucial for the development of sport and Mike Huggins, in noting how the north-east was ‘becoming a hot-bed of soccer’ by 1890, has identified ‘economic and social changes in the region’ as being crucial in the transition from friendly matches to league and cup competitions.<sup>219</sup> In Donegal, attempts to institutionalise sports such as cricket and soccer in the 1890s were undoubtedly hindered by the slow rate of change within society there.

It is unlikely that these three regions in particular could be classified as peripheral in a British sense. Significantly they all had sufficient industries to maintain their populations and did not suffer from emigration or poverty to the same extent as Donegal in the late nineteenth century. Even more remote areas such as Cornwall, lying in the South-west corner of

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<sup>216</sup> Neil Tranter, ‘The Patronage of Organised Sport in Central Scotland, 1820-1900’ in *Journal of Sports History*, vol.16, no. 3 (1989), pp 227-47, p. 227.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p.228.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>219</sup> Huggins, ‘The Spread of Association Football in North-east England’, p. 316.

England, had industries such as mining and a fairly effective rail network to ensure the development of cricket.<sup>220</sup> Society in the north-east Donegal area, despite its proximity to Derry city and early attempts to run sporting structures through administrative bodies, failed to accommodate the development of a sporting infrastructure similar to these regional areas in Britain in the late nineteenth century. Donegal was essentially a peripheral Irish county with its lack of industry, high levels of emigration and low levels of prosperity at this time, and its experience of how sport developed appears to have been more similar to a number of other peripheral Irish counties, with a general failure of sport as a professional or commercial entity but nonetheless able to cater for localised competitions and clubs, which at times came and went. As noted earlier in this thesis, there were a number of factors which set Donegal apart from other peripheral Irish counties such as the religious divisions within the county, the cultural links with Scotland through seventeenth century settlers and at a later stage, seasonal migration, along with economic and political links which meant that East Donegal was more like Ulster, politically and economically. With migration and religious divides commonplace, it may also have been more socially dislocated than peripheral counties such as Mayo and Kerry, and this will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

The survival of pre-codified hurling into the early twentieth century in Donegal has illustrated the slowness of reacting to societal changes, which, as seen in the previous chapter, was a widespread feature of life within the county. The inability to replicate some English and Scottish patterns of sporting development associated with the sporting ‘revolution’ is also evident.<sup>221</sup> In particular, the failure of the East Donegal Cricket Union and the County Donegal Cricket League, as well as the County Donegal FA, to develop

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<sup>220</sup> Ian David Clarke, *The Development and Social History of Cricket in Cornwall, 1815-1881*, (Leicester, 2004)

<sup>221</sup> Taylor, *The Association Game*, p.45.

throughout the county, or even to be maintained for a period longer than half a decade, highlights the contrast between a sustained sporting revolution and an incomplete one. The acknowledgement of the work of individuals in the spread of sport, rather than any central administrative agency, is fundamental to understanding how sport spread in this area. Tranter's assertion that 'at the macro level the organisational "revolution" in sport was reflected in the widespread establishment of governing bodies to oversee the rules and organise and run competitions' may be successfully applied to some parts of Britain, but at a micro level, in the case of Donegal, this was not how sport developed.<sup>222</sup>

While County Donegal lacked many of the factors associated with the growth of sport in some parts of Britain in the nineteenth century, its population was able to take pride in and initially organise localised, sometimes annually held events. In a number of villages, teams and clubs were developed, although the majority of these had to do without a competitive structure for their games in the late nineteenth century. Although the stages of development were not as rapid as in some areas in England, as can be seen above, the rates at which certain sports were introduced into Donegal society were not all that different to those in Westmeath even if the choice of sport available was not as great. This may seem contradictory and Hunt has stated that a declining population and a lack of major industry did not prove unfavourable to the development of sport in Westmeath.<sup>223</sup> Crucial factors in the lack of sustainability in Donegal appear to have been the level of patronage, the physical nature of the county with its poor transport network and the difficulty in getting groups of people together as a result of this.

Of major significance to the spread of soccer and cricket in north-east Donegal was the area's close location to Derry city and Tyrone. This illustrates the influence of external

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<sup>222</sup>Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society*, p.24.

<sup>223</sup>Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.253.

agents in the dissemination of these codes within the county and is a key factor in the development of sport in Donegal. The influence of sports clubs and governing bodies within Derry on the development of sport in north-east Donegal is of major significance to this thesis. In this way, the development of sport in Donegal was perhaps unique in an Irish setting in that it benefited from this proximity. Until more research is undertaken on the influence of external cities on other Irish counties, it is difficult to draw an accurate comparison here.

Another key finding is that these codes developed quicker in the north-east area than in more isolated regions and the physical nature of the county hampered their spread to other more isolated areas. In the case of soccer, other factors, such as the philosophy of muscular Christianity, political involvement and, in Ballyshannon, the role of the military, were more important in their introduction. The failure of both cricket and association football's administrative bodies to form substantial networks outside their local areas is reflective of the problem of uniting the county. Again, more research is needed on the development of sporting patterns throughout Ireland and it is therefore difficult to establish how Donegal fitted in with national patterns in the development of each sport. However through a comparison, mainly with events in Westmeath, Scotland and England, this chapter has shown that the county's isolation further delayed the progress of the sporting 'revolution' as experienced in some parts of Britain and illustrates the peculiarities of regional trends and their impact on the dissemination of codified sports.

## **Chapter 3: The Failure of the GAA in Donegal, 1884-1905**

### **Introduction**

The development of the early GAA failed to make any substantial difference to the lives of the majority of those in Donegal. As will be seen in the first section of this chapter, the poor transport and communications network which had hampered the development of all sport in the county in the nineteenth century naturally had an impact on attempts to form and link up GAA clubs. In addition to this, the foundation of the GAA in 1884 was met with indifference in Donegal and failed to gain even a passing mention in the local press. While the distance from Thurles undoubtedly played a part in the lack of involvement of any Donegal locals sympathetic to Michael Cusack's intentions, there was also a distinct lack of interest shown by any potential organisers or patrons in high positions in society. Added to this, association football was attracting interest for much of the 1880s and provided competition with a number of Gaelic football combinations switching codes. The majority of Donegal's early GAA clubs, mainly located in the Inishowen peninsula, were operational only because of their proximity to Derry city, where the GAA was already in existence and their activities generally took place in isolation from the rest of the county.

The second section of this chapter illustrates the level of playing activity of Donegal's first GAA clubs and combinations. This is important as it shows that these early teams relied heavily on those in Derry for instruction, organisation and opposition. It will also show how problems with adapting to the rules of the GAA hampered their development. Although they were not directly challenged by external problems such as the Parnell Split or clerical condemnation, they were simply not strong enough to survive the collapse of the GAA in Derry, which had a knock on effect on their activities. Finally an analysis of efforts to continue with Gaelic games in the period from 1892 until 1905 is given and the importance of local organisers in the promotion of the GAA in Donegal is highlighted.

## **I The slow development of the GAA in Donegal**

There was no recorded involvement by anyone from Donegal at the founding meeting of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Thurles, County Tipperary on the first day of winter 1884. It is unclear exactly how many people were in attendance; however it seems that only seven can be positively identified as having been there.<sup>1</sup> No doubt distance would have provided a hindrance to anyone wishing to travel from Donegal and it is unknown if there were any messages of support sent from the county. It was noted in the press that ‘about sixty letters and telegrams’, written by ‘representative men both lay and clerical’ were read at the meeting but only a small number were published at the time.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore possible that there may have been some correspondence from Donegal. While Michael Cusack’s enthusiasm could never be doubted, his administrative and interpersonal skills were insufficient to run a national sporting body and eighteen months later he was dismissed from his position as secretary of the GAA.<sup>3</sup> Irish Republican Brotherhood interference in the Association’s affairs led to Davin’s resignation in April of 1887 but they in turn faced strong opposition from the Catholic Church. By 1889, ‘having seen their attempts to prevent the GAA from falling into IRB hands foiled, the clergy mounted a sustained effort to destroy the Association, urging their parishioners to avoid any involvement.’<sup>4</sup> Financial problems and the Parnell split of 1890-91, when the GAA became divided over support for the disgraced leader of the Irish Parliamentary party, meant that by the early 1890s the Association was ‘essentially moribund.’<sup>5</sup> As Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have noted, the number of GAA clubs nationwide dropped from over 1,000 in 1888 to 557 by 1890 and after the Parnell affair, this further declined as ‘only fourteen men attended the 1893 convention and as few as three

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<sup>1</sup>Kieran McConville and Dónal McAnallen, ‘The Search for John McKay’ in Dónal McAnallen, David Hassan and Roddy Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA: Ulaidh, Éire agus Eile* (Armagh, 2009), pp 240-253, p.240

<sup>2</sup>*The Nation*, 8 Nov. 1884.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Rouse, ‘The Politics of Culture and Sport in Ireland: A history of the GAA Ban on Foreign Games 1884-1971. Part One: 1884-1921’ in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol.10, no. 3 (1993), pp 333-360. p.342.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*,.

teams entered the hurling championship played in that same year.’<sup>6</sup> It is against this background that the early development of the GAA in Donegal will be considered.

It is clear that Donegal’s peripheral geographical position was not conducive to the spread of the GAA there in the early years of the Association. Given its lack of urbanisation and distance from the hearth of GAA activity at the time, perhaps it is natural that Donegal, with its rather isolated north-western position, was one of the last counties in Ulster to organise clubs. The direction in which the GAA spread illustrates this. As a number of historians have stated, the Association was slow to get up and running in the province of Ulster and its strength was mainly in the south of the country. Indeed Michael Cusack, in a letter written to Maurice Davin prior to the founding of the GAA, was adamant that ‘the business must be worked from Munster’ as he felt that the organisation would not be well received in Dublin. Cusack also believed that much of the manpower would come from ‘the provinces.’<sup>7</sup> Tom Garvin has noted that ‘in the years immediately after its founding in 1884, the GAA was confined to the southern half of the island: it was a Munster and South Leinster organisation, absorbing much of the old secret society and factional tradition into itself, and remaining relatively immune to the Ribbonism of the north.’<sup>8</sup> This was a reference to the Ribbonmen, a secret Catholic agrarian organisation which had succeeded the Defenders in the early nineteenth century and who opposed the Orange Order.<sup>9</sup> Members of Donegal society were also involved in Ribbonism and RIC reports have noted the existence of this organisation in areas such as Fahan and Buncrana in the late 1880s.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: A People’s History* (Cork, 2009), pp 145-7.

<sup>7</sup>‘The Gaelic Athletic Association Through History and Documents 1870-1920’ Retrieved from <http://www.crokepark.ie/getmedia/e35fa6c0-37od-4d68-831c-85df0f874a0d/web1.pdf> Teachers resource pack. Letter from Michael Cusack to Maurice Davin, 26 Aug. 1884. [Accessed 11 July 2010]

<sup>8</sup>Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* [Second edition] (Dublin, 2005), p.74.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup>Crime Branch Special DICS Reports Box 6. Monthly Secret Report of the Northern Division, 4 March 1888, 521/7556 and Monthly Secret Report of the Northern Division, 4 May 1888, 521/7931.



Despite the slow level of GAA development in Donegal there is evidence that a number of GAA clubs were operating in Ulster in these early years of the organisation. By 1888, out of nine counties, there were five GAA county boards in the province and over a hundred clubs.<sup>11</sup> David Hassan believes that the development of the organisation in Ulster ‘followed a clear path, initially in Co. Cavan, then through Fermanagh and the southern part of the province.’<sup>12</sup> The first official GAA club in Ulster was the J.G. Biggar club in Ballyconnell, County Cavan which was founded in 1885 and the following year the same club was involved in the first GAA match to be held in Ulster.<sup>13</sup> GAA clubs were also being organised in Derry in 1885 and two years later there were also branches in Armagh, Fermanagh and Monaghan.<sup>14</sup> Significantly for those interested in Gaelic games in Donegal’s north-eastern area, a GAA county committee was organised in Derry in 1888.<sup>15</sup> A few weeks prior to Christmas 1889 the GAA there was said to have ‘fourteen branches affiliated, as compared with seven last year.’<sup>16</sup> One Ulster GAA writer has stated that 1888 was a year of ‘phenomenal growth and development’ for the GAA.<sup>17</sup> This was not the case in Donegal. GAA activity in the 1880s in County Donegal was restricted to the north-east of the county. Outside of a small area close to Derry city, the organisation of Gaelic games attracted little interest in other villages in Donegal in the nineteenth century. Location was of great significance at this point due to the influence of GAA clubs in nearby Derry city. This helps explain why the early GAA in Donegal was restricted to a concentrated area in the north-east. Speaking in 1930, B.C. Fay, the secretary of the Ulster GAA Council, stated that one of the

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<sup>11</sup>Dónal McAnallen, ‘Cén Fáth a Raibh Cúige Uladh Chomh Lag Chomh Fada Sin? Deacrachtaí CLG ó Thuaidh, 1884-1945’ (Why was the Province of Ulster so weak for so long? Difficulties of the GAA in the North, 1884-1945) in McAnallen, Hassan and Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA*, pp 138-151, p.138.

<sup>12</sup>David Hassan, ‘The GAA in Ulster’ in Mike Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse (eds.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884-2009* (Dublin, 2009), pp 77-91, p.78.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>15</sup>*DJ*, 29 Oct. 1888.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 18 Dec. 1889.

<sup>17</sup>Con Short, *The Ulster GAA Story* (Rossan, 1984), p.31.

difficulties in the development of the GAA in the county was that it had an ‘unwieldy nature.’<sup>18</sup>

According to Tom Hunt, ‘early club units formed specifically to play Gaelic games were transient structures whose lifespan was often very short.’<sup>19</sup> This was generally the case in Donegal. The north-east Donegal based clubs of Burt Hibernians, Buncrana clubs Cahir O’s and Emmets, Portlough Harps, Killea Hibernians and Newtowncunningham Harps were all in operation between 1888 and 1892. Significantly these clubs were all based in the Inishowen peninsula and were all located in a concentrated region which was relatively near to Derry city, an important trading and transport point for the north of Donegal at this time and where a GAA county committee which encouraged participation from Donegal clubs was present. Cultural boundaries and distance from ‘the place of innovation’ have been cited as reasons for variations in the geographical diffusion of association football in Britain.<sup>20</sup> Inishowen, where the majority of GAA action took place between 1888 and 1892, was an area which remained somewhat isolated from other parts of the county, geographically and culturally, and this no doubt hindered the spread of the GAA in Donegal. The city of Derry had a strong pull for those in the north-east. According to Campbell, Dowds and Mullan, Inishowen ‘was Derry’s natural hinterland’ and ‘distances for Inishowen teams to travel were less than they were in Donegal.’<sup>21</sup> This meant that relationships with GAA and soccer clubs in Derry city were often stronger than with those lying further south in Donegal, and organisers of both codes constantly struggled to develop structures which would see all areas in the county come together.

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<sup>18</sup>DD, 26 April 1930.

<sup>19</sup>Tom Hunt, ‘Parish Factions, Parading Bands and Sumptuous Repasts: The Diverse Origins and Activities of Early GAA Clubs’ in McAnallen, Hassan and Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA*, p.86.

<sup>20</sup>Matthew Taylor, *The Association Game: A History of British Football* (Harlow, 2008), pp 32-4.

<sup>21</sup>Donal Campbell, Damian Dowds and Damian Mullan, *Against the Grain: A History of Burt, its People and the GAA* (Burt, 2000), p.121.

Other teams in operation in this period included the Bundoran Irish Hearts, Finner, the Joys, the Green Volunteers, Moville Harps and Ballynelly Pioneers but none of these made any attempt to arrange fixtures against the six Inishowen clubs named above. It may be inaccurate to call these other six combinations ‘clubs’ and given their scarcity of matches the possibility of sporadic arrangements cannot be overlooked. Hunt has noted the *ad hoc* nature of the organisation of early GAA matches where young men living in an area would challenge those from neighbouring districts to a Gaelic football match.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 3.1: Donegal GAA clubs/teams, 1888-92. Source: *DJ, DV, DI* newspapers, 1888-92.

While the frequency with which the north-eastern clubs used the train for matches is unclear, it can be stated that they were all, unlike many others in the county, able to benefit

<sup>22</sup>Hunt, ‘Parish factions, Parading Bands and Sumptuous Repasts’, p.87.

from the railway network in the area. Although there is little press coverage of Donegal clubs' means of transport, it is highly likely that these players used the train to travel to matches at some stage. In March 1889 the Cahir O's club in Buncrana were visited by three Derry city clubs who availed of the train from Derry.<sup>23</sup> The fact that this club sometimes played their matches on the green beside the train station in the town also added to their accessibility and drew crowds.<sup>24</sup> While there is evidence that some Derry clubs used 'outside cars' drawn by horses around this time, it probably would have been somewhat cheaper and quicker to travel by train.<sup>25</sup> Burt was located just six miles from Derry city and, after 1883, was served by the Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway. Buncrana, 'a small market town' located twelve miles north-west of the city, was the terminal point on this train system while eight miles to the west of Derry lay Newtowncunningham, also served by the rail network.<sup>26</sup> Killea, located less than five miles south-east of Derry was also relatively close to the city with Carrigans village in this parish also served by the Great Northern Railway system at the time.<sup>27</sup> Nearby Portlough village was also within walking distance of the train network and also quite close to Derry. The GAA clubs of these areas were therefore able to benefit from this transport network and the link with Derry in their participation in Gaelic football and hurling matches. As stated earlier, the railway was slow to be developed in the towns and villages outside north-east Donegal, and a number of these areas where the railway network was slow to develop such as Killybegs, Glenties and Ballyshannon failed to organise any GAA clubs in the county at this time.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>*DJ*, 20 March 1889.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 19 March 1890.

<sup>25</sup>Leo Deery and Danny O'Kane (eds.), *Doire: A History of the GAA in Derry 1884-1984* (Coleraine, 1984), p.10.

<sup>26</sup>*Slater's Directory 1894*, (London, 1894)

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>28</sup>See Joe Begley, Dave Bell, Steve Flanders and David White, *The County Donegal Railway: A Visitor's Guide* (Leicester, 1996), p.4 and p.71 and Dave Bell and Steve Flanders, *The Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway: A Visitor's Guide* (Donegal, 1995), p.57.

Other areas in Donegal lacked the enthusiasm, support or simply the competitive structure for GAA clubs to develop. There were no attempts to establish GAA clubs in the north-west, west or south-west of the county until 1905 as soccer gained popularity in these areas in the 1890s. In the south of the county, the Bundoran Irish Hearts GAA club was founded in 1889 but later switched to association football having played only one match against Finner.<sup>29</sup> The lack of activity in nearby Ballyshannon did not help the GAA team's development there. In April 1893, Derry soccer team Collon Rovers defeated 'Caheroes' of Buncrana and this indicates the GAA club may have taken up soccer after their decline.<sup>30</sup> Transfer from Gaelic football to soccer was not uncommon around this time in other counties such as Westmeath as noted by Tom Hunt, while Neal Garnham has stated that 'especially during the early years of football in Ireland, clubs switched regularly between the country's three [football] codes.'<sup>31</sup> Soccer at this point did not attract the type of negative attention which came with the cultural revival at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Donegal and a number of other counties, players and administrators were not, in the 1880s, subject to the press condemnation or monitoring later experienced. As a result, crossover between codes and amongst players was not uncommon.

The GAA struggled to make any impact in the larger urban areas in the county. Donegal's largest towns, Letterkenny and Ballyshannon, suffered from a general apathy towards the organisation of Gaelic games. Despite the town of Letterkenny being described in December 1889 as having the potential for 'finding the necessary fibre' for the hosting of exhibition matches with a view to promoting Gaelic games, it was not until November 1891

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<sup>29</sup>*DI*, 20 April 1889, *DV*, 20 April 1889 and 4 Jan. 1890.

<sup>30</sup>*DS*, 14 April 1893.

<sup>31</sup>See Tom Hunt, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath* (Cork, 2007), p.166 and Neal Garnham (ed.), *The Origins and Development of Football in Ireland, Being a Reprint of R.M. Peter's Irish Football Annual of 1880. With an Introduction by Neal Garnham* (Belfast, 1999), p.171.

that any of these sports were recorded as being played there.<sup>32</sup> This occurred when a Gaelic football match between The Joys and the Green Volunteers was played.<sup>33</sup> However it appears that the Green Volunteers were not a fully fledged GAA team as later in that month they played Derry club Ivy in an association football match.<sup>34</sup> A Gaelic football match took place at Ballynelly in Inishowen, between Moville Harps and Ballynelly Pioneers that same month. These two teams were said to have been ‘lately organised’ and ‘great interest was taken in the match.’<sup>35</sup> This game appears to have been an isolated fixture as no further evidence of these teams was found. Given the general state of the GAA at the time with the Parnell Split it is perhaps unsurprising that they did not flourish.

According to RIC reports a Gaelic football club was in existence in Letterkenny during 1892 and 1893 but few details were given as to the extent of its activities other than to say that it was a Gaelic football club and was established only for athletic purposes.<sup>36</sup> The popularity of cricket and association football in Letterkenny no doubt curtailed interest in Gaelic games there.<sup>37</sup> By 1894 the RIC were no longer noting the presence of a Gaelic football team in the town.<sup>38</sup> The failure of those in the southern town of Ballyshannon to show sufficient interest in Gaelic games at this time undoubtedly led to a lack of organisation of the GAA in this area. Members of the community with social influence who had organised local sporting events showed no interest in promoting Gaelic games. This was not always the case in other counties such as Westmeath, where, in Mullingar, the men organising their Gaelic football club in the early 1890s were ‘leaders of their particular community.’<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>*DJ*, 18 Dec. 1889.

<sup>33</sup>*DV*, 13 Nov. 1891.

<sup>34</sup>*DJ*, 18 Nov. 1891.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 18 Nov. 1891.

<sup>36</sup>See for example, Crime Branch Special Northern Division District Inspector’s Monthly Report for Donegal, January 1892, 520S/8058 and February 1893, 520S/10368.

<sup>37</sup>See Sam Fleming, *Letterkenny Past and Present* (Ballyshannon, 1979), pp 78-9 and *DJ*, 8 Jan. 1892.

<sup>38</sup>Crime Branch Special Northern Division District Inspector’s Monthly Report for Donegal, January 1894 520S/12012.

<sup>39</sup>Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.162.

Needless to say these areas in South Donegal were too far from the heart of GAA activity in Donegal to have any involvement with the north-eastern clubs given, as noted in chapter one, the state of transport and communications at the time. Transporting groups of young men was not deemed to be an easy task in some areas where the train was not in operation and roads were badly surfaced. The north-east Donegal GAA clubs existed mainly in isolation from the rest of the county and no interest in participation was expressed in the local press from those in other areas in Donegal. These clubs expressed little interest in forming their own county board at the time and their close proximity to their Derry counterparts, allied to a general lack of other GAA clubs outside this north-east region and an inadequate communications and transport network, meant that this undertaking was unnecessary and would have been impractical.

The difficulties in initiating the GAA into Donegal society were illustrated in Rathmullan at the end of 1886. The organisation of a fourteen-aside hurling match at Christmas 1886 by Rathmullan native and Metropolitan hurling club member Cathal MacGarvey appears to have been an exceptional attempt to encourage Gaelic games prior to 1888.<sup>40</sup> Plans were made for another match to be held on New Year's Day 'by the same persons' but this received no attention in the local newspapers.<sup>41</sup> Whether or not MacGarvey hoped to set up a club is also unrecorded. Hurling did not gain a foothold in Rathmullan without his leadership as he returned to Dublin after his Christmas holidays. Someone new or returning to a community, with a strong passion for the game and knowledge of the playing rules, was often a significant factor in the spread of sport within an area.<sup>42</sup> Clearly there was not enough enthusiasm shown after MacGarvey's departure, but in any case a lack of organisation and equipment, the failure to obtain their own pitch, an absence of local

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<sup>40</sup>*DJ*, 29 Dec. 1886.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>42</sup>Huggins, 'The Spread of Soccer in North-east England, 1876-1890: The Pattern of Diffusion', pp 302-7.

opposition and sufficient financial aid were other reasons why this did not succeed. At the beginning of the 1890s association football became the number one sport in this village with a number of prominent Rathmullan based men heavily involved in the County Donegal Football Association by 1896.<sup>43</sup>

RIC reports provide some explanation as to why the GAA did not flourish in Donegal in the late 1880s. The strength of the National League was deemed to be a hindrance to the spread of the GAA there and the GAA lacked the cultural space necessary to develop because of this. In March 1889, one District Inspector remarked that ‘it is curious that the GAA has not spread to County Donegal, if it had, probably the National League would not be so powerful there, as it is at present.’<sup>44</sup> This organisation was the successor to the Land League, was ‘firmly under Parnell’s control, and combined a moderate agrarianism, a Home Rule programme and electoral functions.’<sup>45</sup> In 1888 there were at least thirty-seven Irish National League clubs in Donegal.<sup>46</sup> Given the social dislocation in the county with the Land War, evictions and widespread poverty in areas such as Gweedore around this time, the organisation of the GAA in the county was probably not high on the agenda of those involved in this. It appears that, given the RIC’s view of the GAA as a nationalist organisation, they saw little need for the GAA in Donegal with the prominence of the National League there. In any case, National League branches in Donegal do not appear to have made the same effort or have had the same interest in promoting the GAA as those in other areas in Ulster such as South Derry.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>*DJ*, 3 June 1896.

<sup>44</sup>Crime Branch Special DICS Reports Box 6. Monthly Secret Report of the Northern Division, 4 March 1889, 522/9501.

<sup>45</sup>Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, p.88.

<sup>46</sup>In 1888 the *Derry Journal* provided regular reports on the activities of thirty-seven of these clubs.

<sup>47</sup>National League clubs in South Derry were heavily linked to GAA clubs in the mid-1880s. I am grateful to Dónal McAnallen for this reference.



The lack of Fenianism in County Donegal was a problem for the spread of the GAA in the nineteenth century given the amount of influence the Irish Republican Brotherhood held in the Central council of the GAA by 1887.<sup>48</sup> Given the RIC suspicion of the GAA, the activities and strength of the Association fell under the heading of ‘nationalist organisations’ in their monthly reports. The RIC do not appear to have been overly concerned with the state of nationalist organisations in Donegal in the late 1880s. Not all District Inspector’s monthly reports are available from the late 1880s and early 1890s but it is possible to gain an insight into the lack of relationship between the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the GAA in Donegal at the time to some degree using the divisional reports recorded by the RIC which still exist. It is evident that the IRB was weak in Donegal and perhaps this lack of activity in the county did not help the development of the GAA there. Writing in November 1887, District Inspector Reeves illustrated his views on the state of secret societies in Donegal:

We have had very little information from the Co. Donegal latterly but except in a few places where the population is pretty thick. I do not think that secret society work is carried out to any great extent. The physical condition of the county and its population thinly scattered over a wide area prevents I think as a rule the formation of secret societies.<sup>49</sup>

He also felt that there were no travelling members of secret societies from outside the county visiting Donegal and this was significant as it went ‘far to show that secret organisation is not kept up from a distance.’<sup>50</sup> The isolated, rural nature of the county which was not conducive to a strong communications network is also apparent in his comments and this lack of urbanisation, and lack of IRB involvement in Donegal, was undoubtedly a problem for the spread of the GAA in Donegal. Writing in *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster*, Desmond Murphy has highlighted a number of reasons why the IRB did not develop in Donegal after

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<sup>48</sup>Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People’s History*, pp 3-4 and p.142.

<sup>49</sup>Crime Branch Special DICS Reports Box 6. Monthly Secret Report of the Northern Division, 4 Nov. 1887, 261/6939.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*,

its formation in 1858. He states that ‘agrarian tension probably hindered the spread of Fenianism in Co. Donegal in the 1860s’ and that Donegal at that time ‘represented a mosaic of political culture.’ The isolated position and poor communications system of West Donegal, the failure of those in North Donegal to embrace national emancipation, and the ‘weakness of agricultural labourers’ and emigration in the east of the county have all been identified as reasons why the Fenian movement did not gain sufficient support in the county.<sup>51</sup> It is unsurprising then that there was a lack of IRB involvement in the first Donegal GAA clubs and there is indeed no evidence that any clubs were formed as a result of IRB intervention or participation.

Significantly for the failure of the development of the GAA in Donegal in the late nineteenth century, the county was located further away from the early centres of the GAA in South Leinster and Munster than two other peripheral, maritime counties, Kerry and Mayo. GAA events were being organised in Tralee in 1885 and in November 1888 the first county convention was held there.<sup>52</sup> The early development of sport in Kerry was helped by a more centralised railway line which connected the urban centres of Listowel and Tralee, having been put in place in 1880.<sup>53</sup> As Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have noted, the GAA chose to hold its most significant athletic meetings in 1885 in towns which had major rail connections, as Clonmel (Tipperary) and New Ross (Wexford) were also selected.<sup>54</sup> Political involvement in the GAA in Kerry was also closely linked to more national trends as a number of members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood were involved in the initial GAA sports held in Tralee in June 1885 and later became involved in the GAA’s Executive.<sup>55</sup> In 1891 the county claimed its first All-Ireland hurling title and while, in line with the national decline of the GAA in the

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<sup>51</sup> Desmond Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster 1790-1921* (Derry, 1981), pp 135-6.

<sup>52</sup> Richard McElligott, ‘Forging a Kingdom: The Establishment and Development of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Kerry, 1884-1924’, unpublished Ph.D thesis, University College Dublin, 2012, p.29 and p.40.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>54</sup> Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People’s History*, p. 82.

<sup>55</sup> McElligott, ‘Forging a Kingdom’, p.37.

early 1890s, activity temporarily ceased, the GAA in Kerry was revived in the early 1900s.<sup>56</sup>

Therefore while Kerry may appear as peripheral as Donegal in a geographical sense, there were a number of subtle differences which meant Donegal remained isolated from more centralised GAA affairs.

Similarly the GAA got off to an early start in Mayo, with clubs in operation by 1885. Twelve teams had affiliated to the Central Council of the GAA by the end of 1886 and the county's first championship final for Gaelic football took place in 1888.<sup>57</sup> After a decline in the 1890s Mayo re-affiliated to the Central Council of the GAA in 1902.<sup>58</sup> Ballina was the early centre of the GAA there, and a railway network was in place in this town since 1873, easing sporting transport difficulties.<sup>59</sup> These counties also had larger Roman Catholic populations than Donegal and while emigration affected all three counties, the population of both Mayo and Kerry's larger towns were higher than those in Donegal, which, as stated, had only two towns, Ballyshannon (2,471) and Letterkenny (2,320) with populations of over 2,000 people in 1891. While all three counties had a number of smaller towns with populations of over 1,000 people and a number of villages under this figure, Mayo's largest town in 1891 was Ballina which had a population of 4,386 (although 1,194 of these people were said to be living in Sligo) while Westport's population was 4,041.<sup>60</sup> Castlebar had a population of 3,558 and the county's overall population was 219, 034 of which Roman Catholics made up 213, 602 of this figure. There were 4, 351 Protestant Episcopalians living in the county while Presbyterians (722), Methodists (218) and 141 'others' completed this total.<sup>61</sup> This means that Catholics made up 97.52% of the overall total, which was a much larger percentage of Roman Catholics than in Donegal, which, out of a population of 185,635

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<sup>56</sup> McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom', p.70.

<sup>57</sup> Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: County by County* (Cork, 2011), p. 279.

<sup>58</sup> Marcus De Burca, *The GAA: A History* [Second Edition] (Dublin, 2000), p.68.

<sup>59</sup> *Irish Press GAA Golden Jubilee Supplement 1934*, p.56 and 'History of Ballina Town' Retrieved from <http://www.ballinatc.ie/AboutBallina/HistoryofBallinaTown/> [Accessed 28 Oct. 2012]

<sup>60</sup> *Thom's Official Directory for the year 1894* (Dublin, 1894), p.1132.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*,

in 1891, was home to 142, 893 (76.98%) Roman Catholics.<sup>62</sup> The remaining religious denominations in Donegal made up 23.02% of the overall figure and mainly became involved in other sports such as soccer and cricket. As the GAA was mainly a nationalist, Roman Catholic organisation, it is perhaps less surprising that it struggled to get up and running in Donegal.

While both Kerry and Mayo were also predominantly agrarian societies, the population of Kerry's major urban centres was also greater than Letterkenny and Ballyshannon respectively. Tralee was home to 9,318 people in 1891 while Killarney (5,510) and Listowel, with a population of 3,566, were larger urban settlements than Donegal's chief towns.<sup>63</sup> Although Kerry had a smaller population (179,136) than Donegal, like Mayo, its population was overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. There were 173, 195 Catholics living in Kerry and this was 96.68% of the overall total. Religious denominations such as Presbyterians also had a much higher population in Donegal (18,055) than in Kerry (210).<sup>64</sup> Similarly while Kerry had 5,111 Protestant Episcopalians, a total of 21, 884 people resident in Donegal were members of this religion.<sup>65</sup> These regional variations must also be taken into account in the study of how sport developed within peripheral Irish counties.

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<sup>62</sup> *Thom's Official Directory for the year 1894*, p. 1061.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1092.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1061, p. 1092 and p. 1132.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*,

## II Rules, matches and competitions

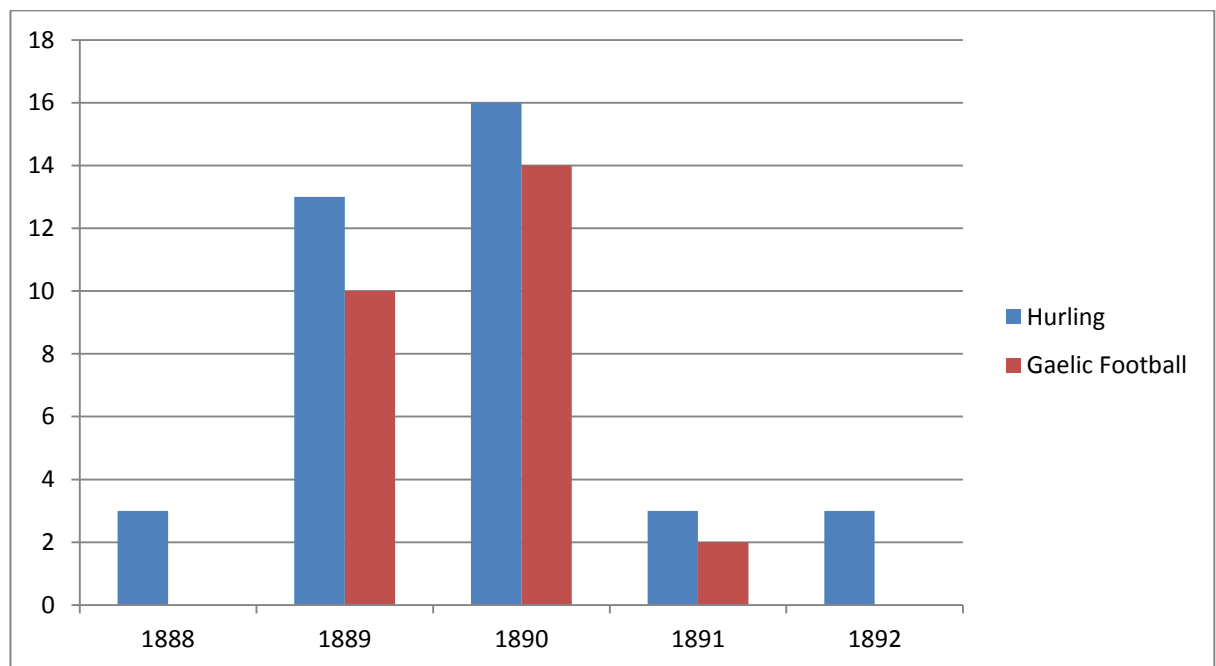


Figure 3.2: Hurling and Gaelic Football matches in Donegal, 1888-92. Source: *DJ, DV, DI* and *Sport* newspapers, 1888-92.

The following discussion demonstrates that Donegal's GAA teams and clubs relied heavily on those in Derry for matches and struggled with the rules while failing to establish their own competitive structure. In the period from February 1888 until Christmas 1892 Donegal's GAA selections took part in a combined total of sixty-five matches, as illustrated in figure 3.2.<sup>66</sup> Thirty-eight hurling matches were played and twenty-six Gaelic football matches took place with one unspecified match being held prior to the founding of the Cahir O's club. Twenty-one of these fixtures were back to back matches with hurling taking place first followed by Gaelic football and this made more sense for reasons of organisation. Fifty-seven of these matches were 'challenge' or friendly matches with Donegal teams being involved in only eight competitive fixtures in these years. Fifty-one matches were against Derry opposition while the remaining fourteen were between Donegal clubs. This illustrates the Donegal clubs' general lack of interest in competition and their reliance on Derry teams for

<sup>66</sup>For a breakdown of these matches see appendix 1. While it is unclear if the Joys, Green Volunteers, Ballynelly Pioneers, Moville Harps, Finner and the Bundoran Irish Hearts were actually clubs, they have been included.

opposition. The vast majority of matches were played by North-east Donegal combinations with only Bundoran in the south hosting a Gaelic football match in 1889. The early years of Donegal GAA thus existed as part of the Derry hinterland rather than as a county wide phenomenon.

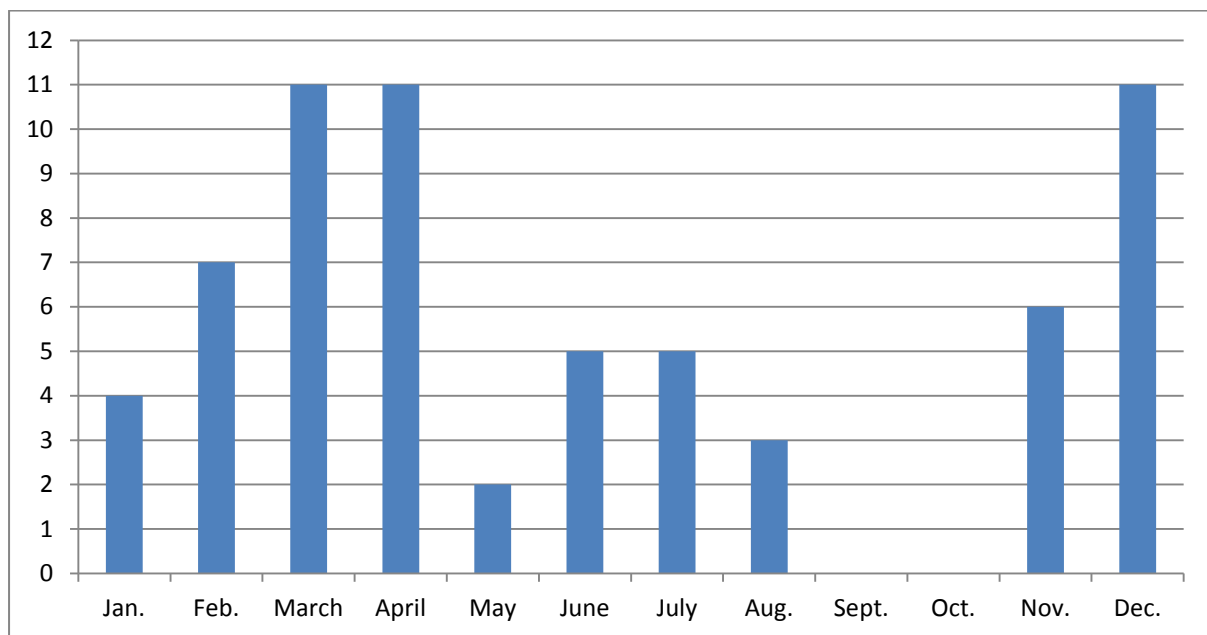


Figure 3.3: Number of GAA matches played on a monthly basis in Donegal, 1888-92. Source: *DJ*, *DV*, *DI* and *Sport* newspapers, 1888-92.

Figure 3.3 shows when these games were played. Matches generally took place in the spring and winter. Twenty-nine matches were played in the spring months. Seven were held in February with twenty-two taking place in March and April while twenty-one were held in the winter months of November, December and January. Twelve matches were held in the summer while there were only three held in the autumn. No matches were held in September or October and this can be explained by the fact that the harvest was usually gathered in these months. As Hunt has noted in his study of Gaelic football in Westmeath from 1890 to 1893, teams lacked their own grounds and usually had to make do with the loan of farmers' fields and winter and spring provided the best opportunities when crops would not be damaged by

players and spectators.<sup>67</sup> This was a similar pattern in Donegal although the higher levels of matches played in March, April and December can also be explained by the fact that tournaments were held in Derry on St Patrick's Day, Easter and at Christmas. Interestingly the Cahir O's played continuously through the summer of 1889 while the majority of other GAA clubs in Donegal appear to have been inactive throughout the summer with fields being used for farming. The club had secured a pitch from local butcher William Longwill thus explaining their exceptional prolonged activity.<sup>68</sup>

Under GAA rules at the time, hurling games were supposed to last for eighty minutes and Gaelic football was to have an hour's play with teams changing over at half-time. A number of rules, generally regarded to have been drawn up by Maurice Davin, had been adopted for the playing of Gaelic football and hurling at the GAA's second convention in December 1884 and published the following February.<sup>69</sup> Hurling was initially given twelve rules while ten were devised for Gaelic football. As Tom Hunt has noted, 'Gaelic football was essentially a compromise game that combined elements of folk football, soccer, rugby and Australian Rules with the intention of creating a distinctive football code.'<sup>70</sup> Hurling under GAA rules differed in a number of ways from earlier versions of stick and ball games in Ireland. The rules of these new codes limited the number of players on each team to between twenty-one and fourteen although this number was reduced to seventeen in 1896.<sup>71</sup> The referee had the power to send players off for foul play and he was assisted by two umpires. The width between the goalposts in hurling was bigger than in Gaelic football (twenty feet as opposed to fifteen with crossbars ten feet from the ground) and the length and width of hurling pitches were also greater. The goal frame was originally the same shape as that of

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<sup>67</sup>Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.155.

<sup>68</sup>*DJ*, 19 Nov. 1888.

<sup>69</sup>Rouse, 'The Politics of Culture and Sport in Ireland', p.341.

<sup>70</sup> Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.152.

<sup>71</sup>Joe Lennon, 'An Overview of the Playing Rules of Gaelic Football and Hurling, 1884-2010' in McAnallen, Hassan and Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA*, pp 164-74, p.167.

soccer but this was adapted in 1886 with point posts being introduced to both sides of the goalposts and the crossbar set at eight feet off the ground in 1896. The H-shape goal frame was not adopted until 1910. The playing area of a hurling field was set at two hundred yards long and one hundred and fifty yards wide while a Gaelic football pitch was a lot smaller, measuring one hundred and twenty yards in length by eighty yards wide. Again these figures were later reduced towards the end of the nineteenth century and by 1910 both fields had the same measurements, one hundred and forty to seventy yards long by eighty-four to one hundred yards wide. Forfeit points were initially awarded against teams who put the ball out over their own end-line but this rule was changed in 1896. Initially a goal was worth more than any number of points but this was later reduced to equal five points and finally three.<sup>72</sup>

As Paul Rouse has stated, the initial rules of the GAA ‘were vague in the extreme and cleavage over playing rules lingered on’ in the early years of the organisation.<sup>73</sup> Gaelic games in Donegal were no different in this respect. Implementation of these rules there was not always straightforward. Matches were sometimes cut short due to poor timekeeping and lateness in arrival. Generally the captains came to an agreement. In January 1890 hurling and Gaelic football matches between Newtowncunningham Harps and McCarthy’s were reduced to fifteen minutes each ‘owing to the lateness of the evening.’<sup>74</sup> The following May a Gaelic football match between Young Irelands and Portlough Harps was reduced to ‘two quarters’ at the agreement of each captain, ‘it getting well on the evening.’<sup>75</sup> The early sunset in winter matches sometimes put fixtures under pressure. Burt Hibernians’ hurling match against St Columb’s at the Christmas tournament in 1890 had to be scrapped as it was deemed too dark to start.<sup>76</sup> Referees were generally from a neutral club with umpires being from opposing

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<sup>72</sup>Lennon, ‘An Overview of the Playing Rules of Gaelic Football and Hurling’, pp 166-7.

<sup>73</sup>Rouse, ‘The Politics of Culture and Sport in Ireland’, p.341.

<sup>74</sup>*DJ*, 31 Jan. 1890.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 May 1890.

<sup>76</sup>*DJ*, 31 Dec. 1890.



clubs but this did not prevent disputes and it is clear that the referees did not, or could not, always keep up with the play. A goal scored by Lambhill Harps of Glasgow against Cahir O's in July 1890 was hotly disputed and the fact that the Harps' umpire said nothing and the referee 'was in the centre of the field' when the goal was scored did nothing to help matters.<sup>77</sup>

Sunday was the nationwide day for Gaelic games with tournaments also being held at Christmas, Easter and on St Patrick's Day in Derry. Neal Garnham has stated that 'the established time to play sports in nineteenth-century Ireland was on Sunday.'<sup>78</sup> This was in accordance with the beliefs of the Catholic Church and it was also a continuation of previous sporting traditions in Ireland. As noted earlier, Ireland, significantly, 'gained little from the statutory regulation of working hours that developed in the nineteenth century, and which has been seen as crucial in the development of a modern sporting culture in England.'<sup>79</sup> Therefore Sunday was the only day of rest for those involved primarily in agriculture and services such as retailing and the GAA provided an outlet for many of these workers. Tournaments enabled the Derry GAA to bring together their affiliated clubs for a series of matches throughout the day and draw bigger crowds than one-off matches would attract. They consisted of hurling and Gaelic football matches with athletic events such as races and jumping competitions adding to the day's entertainment. Gold and silver medals were sometimes provided as an incentive while individual skills competitions such as the long puck and football place kicking gave players an increased chance to demonstrate their talents.<sup>80</sup> These additional events gave spectators better value for money than what was available at rugby and soccer matches.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *DJ*, 30 July 1890.

<sup>78</sup> Neal Garnham, 'Accounting for the Early Success of the Gaelic Athletic Association' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. xxxiv, no. 133. (2004), pp 65- 78, p.71.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 71-2.

<sup>80</sup> *DJ*, 25 Dec. 1889.

<sup>81</sup> Garnham, 'Accounting for the Early Success of the Gaelic Athletic Association', p.74.

However not every Donegal club was interested in participating in these tournaments. While Burt Hibernians took part in the Christmas tournament at Pennyburn in 1888 they did not enter the following year having decided not to affiliate as was required to enter the Derry county committee's competitions.<sup>82</sup> Donegal had three teams represented at this 1889 Christmas tournament at Springtown. Players from Killea Hibernians, Portlough Harps and Cahir O's all participated in hurling matches that day but this was the only tournament they entered.<sup>83</sup> Burt Hibernians and Newtowncunningham Harps both entered for the 1890 Christmas tournament but neither team took part due to organisational problems.<sup>84</sup> Buncrana Emmets showed no interest in these tournaments and preferred to play challenge matches. This lack of ambition is also illustrated in the fact that only Burt Hibernians took part in the Derry hurling championship of 1889 and again in 1891 while Newtowncunningham Harps, in entering both the Gaelic football and hurling championships in the latter year, were the only other Donegal club to experience championship action. These championships would begin in the early months of the year and often had a number of months between each match due to the slowness of committee organisation and protests but were usually finished in the summer. There were no championships held in 1888 with the county committee only starting to find their feet late in the year while administrative problems meant that 1890 also passed without matches of this type taking place. By 1892 the Derry GAA was in decline and no championships or tournaments were held in the city. As the fate of the GAA in Donegal had become so entwined with that of Derry, weakness there had a heavy impact on Donegal. This lack of widespread participation by all the north-east Donegal clubs in the Derry championships and tournaments, while acknowledging organisational difficulties at the time, illustrate a failure of the majority of these clubs to commit to the Derry county committee and a general desire to stick to challenge matches.

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<sup>82</sup>*DJ*, 28 Dec. 1888.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, 30 Dec. 1889.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 31 Dec. 1890.

Donegal teams struggled at times to adapt to the rules and skills required for Gaelic games. Their lack of experience and unwillingness to adapt were sometimes to blame for their poor performances. Burt Hibernians' failure to evolve was at times thought to be detrimental to their progress. After their defeat at the 1888 Christmas tournament, one Derry reporter felt that 'it was evident that on hard ground they would go a long way to defeat any of our local teams.'<sup>85</sup> This was a reference to their barefooted appearance despite the wet conditions. Their decision to stick with the traditional camán which differed from more modern forms attracted attention in the local press and its awkwardness was blamed for their defeat in the Derry hurling championship semi-final of 1889.<sup>86</sup> Other clubs suffered from similar problems. After Portlough Harps were defeated by Young Irelands in April 1890, the reporter had some advice for them:

Do away with your camáns and replace them with hurleys. Stick to your places on the field, and pass the ball more instead of driving her by random, and when this is done, you may defy the North, as far as hurling goes.<sup>87</sup>

Clearly positioning on the field and distribution of the ball also proved difficult for a number of Donegal teams. Killea Hibernians were also advised 'to pay more attention to their places' in March of 1890 and the following month the Buncrana Emmets' players' style of play was also questioned in the local press.<sup>88</sup> Largely defensive but practical tactics were evident as their hurling victory over Cahir O's was said to be partly due to their tactic of 'beating the ball over the lines' and it was reported that 'their whole team playing full-backs made it very hard for the Cahirs to score.'<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>*DJ*, 28 Dec. 1888.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 30 Oct. 1889.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 May 1890.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 10 March 1890.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 9 April 1890.

1889 and 1890 were actually the years in which the early north-east Donegal GAA clubs partook in the majority of their matches.<sup>90</sup> An examination of the Donegal clubs' involvement between 1888 and 1892 illustrates that a significant growth took place from four matches being played in 1888 to twenty-three in 1889. This was because the number of clubs increased from two in 1888 to four at the end of 1889 and activity became more frequent. 1890 was the peak year of activity with thirty Gaelic football and hurling matches played.<sup>91</sup> Seventeen of these were hurling and thirteen were Gaelic football. It was during this year that all six of the north-east clubs were active. However in 1891 only five matches were played while the following year only three were recorded. The decline of the majority of these clubs in 1890 can be traced using the example of Buncrana club Cahir O's. They were the most active of these clubs in 1889 and played thirteen matches, which was the highest number of games played by any Donegal club in any year in this period. They enjoyed hosting back-to-back hurling and Gaelic football matches and played at least six of these fixtures in 1889. By July 1889 they had won eight matches and this 'brilliant record' was enough to attract the attention of Derry hurling champions Hibernians who visited and defeated the Buncrana club for the first time the following month.<sup>92</sup> The fact that almost all of their matches were played at home illustrates a lack of interest in travelling and also highlights the fact that it may have been easier for Derry clubs to participate outside the city with clerical condemnation of the GAA there. Certainly this was evident in 1890 as it was not uncommon for a number of Derry clubs such as Young Irelands and St Patrick's to travel as far afield as Dundalk and Dublin because of clerical condemnation.<sup>93</sup> It was not until September of that year that the Derry county committee agreed to continue with 'Sunday playing' and this must have had a

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<sup>90</sup>See *DJ* 1889 and 1890.

<sup>91</sup>See Figure 3.2 and Appendix 1.

<sup>92</sup>*DJ*, 31 July and 7 Aug. 1889.

<sup>93</sup>Deery and O'Kane (eds.), *Doire: A History of the GAA in Derry*, pp 12-3.

disruptive influence on fixtures involving Donegal clubs wishing to travel to Derry for matches.<sup>94</sup>

Despite appointing officers in May 1890, the Cahir O's participated in only eight matches that year and in August were said to have been inactive.<sup>95</sup> This appears to have been due to the disarray of the Derry county committee at this stage and would help explain the aforementioned reference to a soccer team bearing their name in 1893. In July 1890 a letter was written by the secretary of the GAA in Derry, Patrick Campbell, to the Central Council of the GAA requesting them to send a representative to sort out the Association in the city.<sup>96</sup> The Derry clubs of Young Emeralds, McCarthy's and Young Irelands had switched to association football by August of that year while there is evidence that transferring of players was also a problem and that the Derry committee 'encountered opposition to their rules' from the beginning of the season.<sup>97</sup> This county committee had changed hands on a number of occasions between 1888 and 1890 and RIC reports have chronicled the presence and decline of the IRB in this Association.<sup>98</sup> After a visit from future president of the GAA, Frank Dineen, a new county committee was formed in September 1890 but Cahir O's did not affiliate.<sup>99</sup> In fact there were only eight clubs represented at this meeting with Burt Hibernians, Newtowncunningham Harps and Buncrana Emmets the only Donegal clubs to send representatives, which illustrates the damage done by IRB involvement and clerical condemnation.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>*DJ*, 3 Oct. 1890.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 14 May and 27 Oct. 1890.

<sup>96</sup>*Sport*, 5 July 1890.

<sup>97</sup>*DJ*, 18 and 27 Aug. 1890.

<sup>98</sup>See for example, Crime Department Branch Special, Northern Division, Monthly Secret Report for December 1888, 4 Jan. 1889, 1/10297 and Crime Department Branch Special, Northern Division, Monthly Secret Report for April 1889, 5 May 1889, 1/11144.

<sup>99</sup>*Sport*, 11 Oct. 1890.

<sup>100</sup>*Sport*, 11 Oct. 1890.

Cahir O's was not the only Donegal club which lost interest after this decline. It is evident that there were only four matches played by Donegal clubs from the end of July to December 1890 and a total of only eight matches played during 1891 and 1892. This illustrates the dramatic decrease in matches after the summer of 1890. Portlough Harps played only four matches in 1890 and received less attention in the local press than other clubs. In May 1890 their delegate to the Derry county committee, Bernard McElhinney, withdrew from this organisation which was showing signs of difficulties. This appears to have been the end of the club's short-lived participation in the GAA.<sup>101</sup> Neither Portlough Harps nor Killea Hibernians rejoined the new Derry GAA committee, disillusioned perhaps with the state of the GAA in Derry that summer. There is little other evidence of why they would have folded. Killea Hibernians had performed fairly regularly over a five month period from December 1889 until April 1890, participating in six Gaelic football and six hurling matches.<sup>102</sup> However the number of matches played by these clubs was quite low in comparison with other counties such as Down where clubs such as Leitrim Fontenoy's, powered by 'a strong neighbourhood network', played twenty-one hurling matches between 1888 and 1892.<sup>103</sup> The irregularity in the staging of matches would have made it difficult for teams to improve and the aforementioned problems in Derry would have been detrimental to teams' morale.

A number of clubs tried their hand at Gaelic football as well as hurling in 1889 and 1890. This was despite problems within the sport in Derry at the time. It is clear that a number of Derry GAA clubs were fielding soccer players and that the Derry county committee, in banning handling of the ball in Gaelic football did not understand, or want to

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<sup>101</sup> *DJ*, 16 May 1890.

<sup>102</sup> In 1889 and 1890 the *DJ* contained references to these matches.

<sup>103</sup> Hunt, 'Parish Factions, Parading Bands and Sumptuous Repasts', pp 88-9.

rigidly enforce, the rules of the Central Council at that time.<sup>104</sup> Indeed Con Short has stated that catching of the ball in the air did not become popular with Ulster Gaelic football teams until 1910.<sup>105</sup> Given these problems, it must have been difficult for Gaelic football teams in Donegal to develop the standard of their play and attract interest. In tracing the development of this sport, W.F. Mandle has claimed that in the latter decades of the nineteenth century Gaelic football was ‘to the modern eye, an unstructured shambles’ and despite attempts to improve the scoring system and tactics, it was not until 1914 that it became ‘an attractive open game.’<sup>106</sup>

Burt Hibernians were content to focus on hurling. In the period from 1888 until 1893 they were recorded as having played thirteen hurling matches and only three Gaelic football games in the local press.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps this was crucial to their later strength in this sport and was in many ways a continuation of their strong tradition of playing forms of hurling in the area. The lifespan of these Donegal clubs appears to have varied with Burt Hibernians continuing, albeit sporadically, throughout the 1890s. This club differed in that it continued, at some level, to organise matches in the years after 1892. Despite the decline of the majority of Donegal GAA clubs in the early 1890s the Burt club managed to organise a number of matches in 1892 and 1893 and appeared occasionally at Christmas time in the latter half of this decade. The club participated in a camán match against City of Derry on St Stephen’s Day 1895 and four years later against Fahan on the same day.<sup>108</sup> Burt GAA club historian Damian Dowds believes that the future success of the club in the early 1900s was a result of their ‘regular practice and occasional challenge games’ in the last decade of the nineteenth

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<sup>104</sup>*DJ*, 12 and 26 March 1890.

<sup>105</sup>Hassan, ‘The GAA in Ulster’, p.78.

<sup>106</sup>W.F. Mandle, ‘The Gaelic Athletic Association and Popular Culture’ in Oliver MacDonagh, W.F. Mandle and Paucic Travers (eds.), *Irish Culture and Nationalism 1750-1950* (London, 1983), pp 104-121, pp 111-2.

<sup>107</sup>See *DJ* and *Sport* 1888-92.

<sup>108</sup>*DJ*, 30 Dec. 1895 and 29 Dec. 1899.

century.<sup>109</sup> In maintaining their tradition, he believes that the club was ‘a notable exception’ in Donegal.<sup>110</sup> There is little evidence that any of the other county Donegal GAA clubs looked at in this chapter continued through those years after the Derry county board folded in 1891. Without that guidance and organising zeal offered by Derry, Donegal’s fledgeling GAA faltered.

The overall spread of the GAA was not helped by clerical opposition and it has been suggested that 1889 and 1890 were not good years for the GAA in Ulster.<sup>111</sup> A number of reasons have been given for the deterioration of the Association there in 1889. Marcus De Burca, David Hassan and Dónal McAnallen have all noted opposition to the playing of Gaelic games on Sundays from Sabbatarians, and it is evident that in 1889 the GAA in Ulster faced strong opposition from members of the clergy of the Catholic Church such as Archbishop Logue of Armagh, a Donegal born cleric.<sup>112</sup> This was because he and a number of other clerics disapproved of the strong IRB connections within the Association, although the majority of this clerical pressure appears to have taken place in the east and south of the province.<sup>113</sup> Clerical opposition was also evident in counties such as Meath, Westmeath and Kerry around this time.<sup>114</sup> While there appears to be scarce evidence that attempts to play Gaelic games in Donegal suffered directly from either of these problems, in broader terms these did not help matters as the clergy impacted on the development of the GAA in Derry to which the majority of Donegal GAA clubs were connected. The Derry GAA committee was struck another blow in November 1891 when the Bishop of Derry, John Keys O’Doherty,

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<sup>109</sup> Campbell, Dowds and Mullan, *Against the Grain*, p.80.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>111</sup> Short, *The Ulster GAA Story*, p.31.

<sup>112</sup> McAnallen, ‘Cén Fáth a Raibh Cúige Uladh Chomh Lag Chomh Fada Sin?’ in McAnallen, Hassan and Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA*, pp 138-9.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139 and Marcus Bourke, ‘The Early GAA in South Ulster’ in *The Clogher Record*, vol. VII, no. 1 (1969), pp 5-26, pp10-11.

<sup>114</sup> Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.142 and Paul Rouse, ‘The Hand of Power’ in *The Irish Times* 29 Jan. 2009. ‘Celebrating 125 years of the GAA’ pp 51-3, p.51.



publicly denounced the playing of Gaelic games on Sundays.<sup>115</sup> Desmond Murphy has stated that the approach of the clergy in Derry towards Gaelic games ‘altered with the gradual IRB takeover of the GAA signalled by the bitter row at the 1887 Thurles Convention’ where the IRB were confronted by clerics in an attempt to gain control of the GAA.<sup>116</sup> This loss of enthusiasm ‘was accelerated by the Pro-Parnellite outlook of many rank and file members of the GAA in the split of 1890-91.’ He feels that the clergy within Derry City then began to encourage ‘the development of soccer among the Catholic working-class’ and by 1895, this game ‘was the only mass sport in the city.’<sup>117</sup>

By July 1892, Derry club Hibernians were publicly requesting opponents such as Burt Hibernians to participate in friendly matches, which illustrates that some clubs there were still in operation but struggling to find opposition.<sup>118</sup> This request was granted by Burt the following month and significantly admission was free which perhaps shows that support was not very forthcoming at this time.<sup>119</sup> A meeting of the Derry GAA county committee was held the same month but it was adjourned as there were only three clubs in attendance and significantly none of these were from Donegal.<sup>120</sup> What is more, none of the GAA clubs noted by the RIC during 1892 were involved in this, which would illustrate a lack of desire for competition. In September there were calls for a revival of Derry GAA competitions in the *Derry Journal* with news that the hurling championship trophy won by St Patrick’s the previous year had been secured by the county committee.<sup>121</sup> A meeting was held by this

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<sup>115</sup>Eoghan Corry, *Oakboys: Derry’s Football Dream Comes Through* (Dublin, 1993), p.55.

<sup>116</sup>Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster*, pp 171-2.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>118</sup>*DJ*, 13 July 1892.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 Aug. 1892.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 15 Aug. 1892.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 Sept. 1892.

committee the following month but there were no further competitions held until the early 1900s and the Donegal county board was not founded until 1905.<sup>122</sup>

Although Dónal McAnallen believes that there was no split in the GAA in Ulster over the Parnell affair, he is of the opinion that it broke the spirit of the GAA nationally and many people withdrew from national organisations after this.<sup>123</sup> While the opinions of the Donegal clubs on the Parnell split are unrecorded, other problems around this time did little to help their survival. Lack of communication between the Central Council of the GAA and those in the GAA in Donegal was also noted by the RIC. Although a number of Donegal GAA clubs were said to be affiliated to the Central Council, the fact that a Donegal man, James Martin, who had formerly been involved in the GAA, had been elected as ‘Donegal GAA representative at Thurles’ for 1890 without his consent and by virtue of his name still appearing on the administrative books, illustrates the poor communications that Donegal had with those running that national body for Gaelic games at this stage.<sup>124</sup>

The continued problem of distance was also noted in *Sport* at the beginning of 1891. The writer felt that ‘it is too inconvenient and expensive for the representatives of Leinster and Ulster to attend meetings of the Central Council held at Limerick Junction.’<sup>125</sup> Limerick Junction in Tipperary was deemed to be an inconvenient venue for Ulster and Leinster delegates and it was claimed that ‘Ulster is falling asunder for the want of being looked after by some one in authority, and parts of Leinster are nearly as bad.’<sup>126</sup> The aforementioned deterioration of the GAA in Derry also meant that Donegal clubs lacked the inspiration, and of course, given their reliance on Derry clubs for challenge matches in the period from 1888 to 1892, the opposition needed to sustain their clubs. McAnallen has also stated that in the

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<sup>122</sup>*DJ*, 12 Oct. 1892.

<sup>123</sup>McAnallen, ‘Cén Fáth a Raibh Cúige Uladh Chomh Lag Chomh Fada Sin?’, p.141.

<sup>124</sup>Crime Department Special Branch Report on the GAA in the Northern Division: Progress Made During the Year Ended 31 Dec. 1890, 10 Feb. 1891, 2701/S.

<sup>125</sup>*Sport*, 3 Jan. 1891.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*,

years between 1892 and 1898 the GAA was in a state of disarray in Ulster and a revival did not begin until November 1898 in Belfast with an athletics tournament being hosted by the Red Branch hurling club.<sup>127</sup> This revival did not take place until the early twentieth century in Donegal.

Elsewhere, there were also a number of changes within the GAA's Central Council which made the organisation and its games more attractive. Paul Rouse has stated that 'the years 1893 and 1894 saw the GAA reorganising, re-uniting and desperately trying to attract new members.'<sup>128</sup> With a policy of 'de-politicization', the GAA and its secretary Richard Blake brought in a number of administrative changes which stressed a move away from the IRB and political matters during this decade while the playing rules were also improved.<sup>129</sup> While these overall changes may not have had any great influence in a county like Donegal at this time where the GAA was ineffective for most of the 1890s, they did help the progress of Gaelic games there in later years.

In the period from 1902 until 1905 a small number of references to hurling matches involving Donegal clubs appeared sporadically in the local press. With no public interest expressed in the forming of a GAA committee in Donegal at this point, a number of Donegal clubs had to make do with occasional competitions and tournaments. At the Moville Sports during Easter 1902, 'a hurley match' between 'local teams attracted the greatest attention' and prizes were given out in the local Temperance Hall afterwards.<sup>130</sup> Which clubs were involved went unrecorded. Burt Hibernians returned to Derry city on Easter Monday 1902 to compete in the Gaelic Athletic Sports along with St Columb's, St Patrick's and Hibernians in

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<sup>127</sup>McAnallen, 'Cén Fáth a Raibh Cúige Uladh Chomh Lag Chomh Fada Sin?', p.141.

<sup>128</sup>Rouse, 'The Politics of Culture and Sport in Ireland', p.344.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>130</sup>*DJ*, 2 April 1902.

aid of St Eugene's Cathedral bazaar.<sup>131</sup> Having won their match against St Columb's, they were then unsuccessful in the final against Hibernians in May.<sup>132</sup> St Mura's of Fahan defeated this Derry club the following month in a challenge match and were said to have had an 'unbeaten record.'<sup>133</sup> Exactly how many matches this record consisted of is unclear. By the beginning of May 1903 the Burt club had again become affiliated to the GAA for hurling purposes although they did not take part in the Derry hurling championship of that year.<sup>134</sup> They did however take part, albeit briefly, in the North-west hurling league with St Mura's of Fahan having responded to an invitation from the Derry GAA committee.<sup>135</sup> The failure of Burt Hibernians and St Mura's to fulfil their fixtures in this league illustrates their lack of commitment to the overall development of the above committee and also their inability to put personal disputes behind them. Despite both clubs taking part in their initial fixtures in July 1903 it was the end of November before they agreed to take on each other in the next round of matches. They do not appear to have made any progress in playing their other games after this delay.<sup>136</sup>

Although Raphoe Rangers played at least two matches against Tyrone opposition in April 1903, there is no evidence that they continued with their games after this.<sup>137</sup> It seems that the Raphoe club's existence was only a brief one and they did not survive long enough to become affiliated. Like some of the Donegal clubs in the period from 1888 to 1892, this Donegal club found it easier to meet with opponents from an outside county. The Raphoe team benefited from their close proximity to County Tyrone where two hurling clubs had been organised in the border town of Strabane by April of 1903. Branches of the Gaelic League were primarily involved in the organisation of hurling teams in Donegal in 1904 and

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<sup>131</sup>*DJ*, 2 April 1902.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, 5 May 1902.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, 18 June 1902.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 May 1903.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, 29 May 1903.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 18 July, 1 Aug. and 5 Dec. 1903.

<sup>137</sup>See *DP and DN*, 18 and 25 April 1903.

the reasons behind this involvement will be looked at in detail in chapter six. However, it is sufficient to say that teams were organised by Gaelic League branches in the south of the county at Ballyshannon, Bundoran and in the east at Doneyloop but, like Raphoe Rangers, they did not prosper.<sup>138</sup> Without a county committee to organise competitive fixtures, it was difficult for these teams to make any progress, and of themselves they could not bring about the administrative momentum required.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown why the early GAA failed to have any impact in Donegal. Neal Garnham, in assessing the GAA's advantages over rugby and soccer in the late nineteenth century, has emphasised the GAA's nationalist appeal, the opportunities it offered those excluded from sport due to social standing and work commitments, its wider range of events and the availability of alcohol for patrons.<sup>139</sup> As will be seen in chapter six, alcohol was available, but there is no evidence that any Donegal clubs offered athletic sports in their match day programmes and it seems supporters would have to travel to Derry to take advantage of this opportunity. As can be seen in the evidence for cross-over from GAA to soccer, Gaelic games did not provide any major threat to soccer in the county at this point and a lack of familiarity with Gaelic football, and an absence of nearby opposition, may also have influenced sporting choices. Added to this, the lack of evidence for IRB involvement in Donegal's clubs suggests that these GAA clubs were not overtly nationalist, and soccer was not seen as a 'foreign game' at this stage.

The rural nature of the Inishowen clubs hints at an agriculturally based membership and will also be later discussed in greater detail. As those employed in agriculture generally

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<sup>138</sup> *DP and DN*, 9 April, 7 May 1904 and *DV*, 22 April 1904.

<sup>139</sup> Garnham, 'Accounting for the Early Success of the GAA', pp 69-78.

worked on Saturdays, Gaelic games may have been the only sports available to these players. What is clear is that a number of difficulties such as transport, lack of competitive structure and the sparsely populated, rural nature of the county, which also impeded the spread of team sports such as cricket and rugby, also affected the GAA's development. Huggins and Tolson have argued that the positive effect of the railways on the development of sport in Victorian Britain has been overstated, but the case of Donegal suggests that the incompleteness of the railway in this period was certainly a hindrance to the development of sport, and, as seen in this chapter, the presence of the rail network in a concentrated area in Inishowen appears to have, at least briefly, benefited local GAA clubs' activities.<sup>140</sup>

It has again been shown that early sports clubs in Donegal relied heavily on those in external areas for instruction, particularly Derry, and, when left on their own to organise competitions, were unable, or lacked the motivation, to arrange significant structures for the development of team sports throughout the county. Of key significance in this chapter is that the effects of the Parnell Split, and, while clerical condemnation did not directly lead to the collapse of Donegal's GAA clubs, it was Donegal clubs' over-reliance on the GAA in Derry, as seen in the number of matches against Derry clubs, that lead to their demise with collapse of the GAA in the city. An increase in nationalism throughout Ireland in the late nineteenth century was reflected in an improvement in support for Gaelic games in Donegal by the beginning of the 1900s. A handful of GAA clubs, under the auspices of the Gaelic League, were organised, while Burt Hibernians attempted to retain their connections with the GAA in Derry. However, it was not until 1905, with members of Cumann na nGaedheal and the Gaelic League coming to the fore, that Donegal finally got its own GAA county board.

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<sup>140</sup>Mike Huggins and John Tolson, 'The Railways and Sport in Victorian Britain: A Critical Reassessment' in *The Journal of Transport History*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2001), pp 99-115, p.113.

## Chapter 4: The Development of the GAA in Donegal, 1905-1934

### Introduction

In looking at the development of soccer in North-east England between 1876 and 1890, Mike Huggins has summed up what he considers to be ‘key issues’ in its innovation. These included its gradual acceptance, the involvement of those who helped disseminate the game and their networks, the structure of the economy and society and the evolution of values within this sport.<sup>1</sup> In Donegal, efforts to establish the GAA were characterised by a transition from the initial prominence of hurling to the dominance of Gaelic football and this took place under the shadow of association football, which retained its popularity in a number of areas around the county. How this transformation occurred will be discussed as attempts to organise GAA clubs and competitions continued to be a failure until 1919, and even in the following decade, attracting interest was problematic and the level of support afforded was varied. Section one focuses on the development of the 1905-7 county board and the reasons why it failed. It will show that poor organisation, a lack of co-operation throughout the county, the failure of the Ulster GAA Council to show sufficient interest in its development and the loss of key organisers were crucial factors in the board’s decline.

Section II illustrates the efforts that were made to promote Gaelic games in the county in the period between 1908 and 1919. It will show that there was a general lack of interest in Gaelic football and hurling and that the 1916 Rising and the rising tide of political nationalism had no impact on the formation of clubs in the county. Similarly there is little evidence of Donegal GAA involvement in the protests of Gaelic Sunday in August 1918. Section III shows that while the re-founding of the county board required the help of the Ulster GAA Council and a number of Sinn Féin members, there was no widespread

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<sup>1</sup>Mike Huggins, ‘The Spread of Association football in North-east England, 1876-90: The Pattern of Diffusion’, in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1989), p.299.

organisation of GAA clubs by this political party at this time and the influence of these founding members in the GAA quickly declined. The involvement of Donegal's GAA members in the War of Independence and Civil War was minimal and there was no major disruption to fixtures. The development of the GAA in Donegal was reliant on the dedication of a small number of enthusiastic administrators, and their ability to integrate the GAA into local society, initially by the organisation of Gaelic football at local sports days. The provision of annual competitive fixtures for young men interested in team sports was a key factor in spreading interest in the GAA in Donegal and improvements in transport and press coverage also meant that Gaelic football began to attract the public's attention. However, as will be seen, this was a slow, mundane development, and an analysis of club figures reveals that the existence of teams in the 1920s was characterised by instability and lack of development. It was not until the 1930s that Gaelic games were more firmly established in the county and this was helped by improvements at administrative level and the organisation of district committees. Hurling generally failed to develop, partially because it was neglected by the county board but also as a result of difficulties in its dissemination. It remained restricted to Inishowen and outside of this concentrated area, to Ballyshannon and Letterkenny where Garda involvement boosted its development.

## **I 1905-7**

As Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have noted, the revival of the GAA in the late 1890s continued into the opening decade of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter has stated that 'from 1900 on its regional and national administration was overhauled and the entire infrastructure radically overhauled, while football and hurling were transformed into fast, open team games, with ever-increasing attendance and renewed clerical support.'<sup>3</sup> Although

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<sup>2</sup>Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: A People's History* (Cork, 2009), p.147.

<sup>3</sup>Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London, 2004), p.101.



this development was slower in Ulster, the Ulster GAA Council was founded in 1903 and by 1905, Donegal was the only Ulster county in which a county board was not in operation.<sup>4</sup> It was in this year in which the first proper attempt was made to give the GAA a formal, organisational foothold within Donegal society through the foundation of the inaugural Donegal county board on 23 October 1905 at a meeting held in Mountcharles.<sup>5</sup> This was organised by Seumus MacManus and presided over by the Very Reverend Edward Maguire. It was decided at this initial county board meeting that two sub-committees were to be formed for the western and eastern areas as the size of the whole county was deemed to be too big to have only one county board to administer all the clubs, although in actual fact it would have made more sense to have named the divisions north and south.

The area covered was more extensive than where the first GAA clubs were organised and the new organisation's competitions were exclusive to Donegal clubs thereby attempting to loosen the affiliation to Derry. The West Donegal county board would cover the area from 'the Drowes River, west of Bundoran to Glen Head, and from Pettigo to Fintown to Doochary (all of those places included). Ballybofey and Stranorlar, as well as the Rosses, consequently belonged to East Donegal for Gaelic athletic purposes' although Ballybofey later affiliated to the west division.<sup>6</sup> It was the western county board who were first to organise fixtures for their camán clubs. Camán was the first sport to be played although matches did not get underway until December. At the second meeting on 10 November, it was announced that their camán league would be divided into two divisions with a boundary at the Eany River in Inver the dividing area.<sup>7</sup> The Clann Dalaigh league, for teams south of this river, included the clubs of Lámh Dearg, Mountcharles, Balldearg of Donegal town and

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<sup>4</sup>Dónal McAnallen, 'Cén Fáth a Raibh Cúige Uladh Chomh Lag Chomh Fada Sin?' in Dónal McAnallen, David Hassan and Roddy Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA: Ulaidh, Éire agus Eile* (Armagh, 2009), pp. 138-51, p.143.

<sup>5</sup>*DJ*, 25 Oct. 1905.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 Nov. 1905.

Sinn Féin of Bundoran while the Clann Suibne league was established for the more south-western teams of Ardaghey Old Celts, Thomas Davis, Dunkineely and the Croagh Ethna Carberrys. The winners of each division would then meet in the western final, with the victors of this match scheduled to play the eastern board champions for the Bishop's trophy.

Attracting interest was difficult from the beginning. A number of the teams represented at the Grand Camán Parade, a demonstration to promote Gaelic games and the Irish language which was held in Mountcharles on 8 October 1905, did not affiliate. Despite messages of support from throughout the county, not every area was keen to provide more tangible support to the GAA.<sup>8</sup> A Gaelic football league was set up in the west division in May 1906 but only five clubs, Lámh Dearg (Mountcharles), Balldearg, Ballybofey, Sinn Féin (Bundoran) and Ballybofey affiliated. In the eastern section there were six clubs registered for Gaelic football purposes. These were located in Letterkenny, Burt, Gweedore, Fahan, Newtowncunningham and Churchill.<sup>9</sup> These clubs, with the exception of Churchill and Gweedore Celts, also took part in hurling in this division. While the conflict between those interested in Gaelic games and association football will be examined in the next chapter, it is sufficient to say here that the organisation of these Gaelic football leagues attracted little interest from soccer clubs as had been demanded by Seumus MacManus.<sup>10</sup> The number of GAA clubs in Donegal increased gradually in 1906 and although Brackey, Inver, Creeslough, St Columba's of Churchill, and Inch Emeralds all became affiliated that year, not every GAA club in Donegal managed to register.<sup>11</sup>

Despite evidence that clubs had been set up in areas such as Fintown and Glenfin, neither of these teams managed to take part in competitive matches, perhaps due to transport

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<sup>8</sup>*DJ*, 9 Oct. 1905.

<sup>9</sup>*DP and DN*, 12 May 1906.

<sup>10</sup>*DJ*, 1 March 1905.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 7 Feb., 6 April 1906 and *DP and DN*, 19 May 1906 and *DI*, 6 April and 28 Nov. 1906.

difficulties owing to their extremely rural locations.<sup>12</sup> In May 1906, Seumas MacManus stated that there were thirty clubs in the county, with twenty of these affiliated with the GAA.<sup>13</sup> This appears to be fairly accurate as in the period between February 1905 and the end of 1906 there were twenty-nine Donegal GAA clubs mentioned in the local press with eighteen of these involved in competitions run by the Donegal GAA county board while eleven did not take part in these leagues and appeared only occasionally.<sup>14</sup> The organisation of clubs was stronger in the south with sixteen of the total number founded in this area and this is a reflection of MacManus' local influence.



Figure 4.1: Competitive GAA clubs in Donegal, 1905-7. Sources: *DJ*, *DI*, *DV* and *DP and DN*, 1905-7.

<sup>12</sup>*DJ*, 20 Jan. 1906 and 25 Nov. 1905.

<sup>13</sup>*DP and DN*, 5 May 1906.

<sup>14</sup>See *DJ*, *DI*, *DV* and *DP and DN*, 1905-6.



Figure 4.2: Non-competitive GAA clubs in Donegal, 1905-7. Sources: *DJ*, *DI*, *DV* and *DP* and *DN*, 1905-7.

*The Gaelic Athlete Annual and County Directory* for 1907-8 noted that GAA activity in Donegal had lessened significantly by 1907.<sup>15</sup> Newspaper reports also indicate a serious decline in activity at this point. During 1907 there were sporadic references to GAA clubs in Burt, Newtowncunningham, Bundoran (two), Ardaghey, Croagh, Dunkineely and in Donegal town.<sup>16</sup> This figure of eight clubs was a severe drop from the twenty-nine the previous year and De Burca's figure of five in Donegal for 1907-8 is lower although not all of the above clubs may have been registered with the Central Council and therefore may have gone unnoticed.<sup>17</sup> More significantly, Donegal shared with Derry the lowest number of affiliated clubs in Ulster at this time and this highlights the disbandment of the majority of the clubs

<sup>15</sup>*The Gaelic Athlete Annual and County Directory for 1907-8* (Dublin, 1907), p.33.

<sup>16</sup>See *DJ*, *DI*, *DV* and *DP* and *DN* 1907.

<sup>17</sup>Marcus De Burca, *The GAA: A History* [Second edition] (Dublin, 2000), p.73.

founded in 1905 and 1906 at this stage. Out of a provincial total of 105, Antrim had the highest number with eighteen. By comparison, there were 124 in Connaught, 222 in Munster and 337 in Leinster. Cork had the highest number of clubs with seventy-seven while Dublin, with sixty-eight, had the highest number in Leinster and the second highest overall.<sup>18</sup> Why this decline occurred in Donegal will be assessed later.

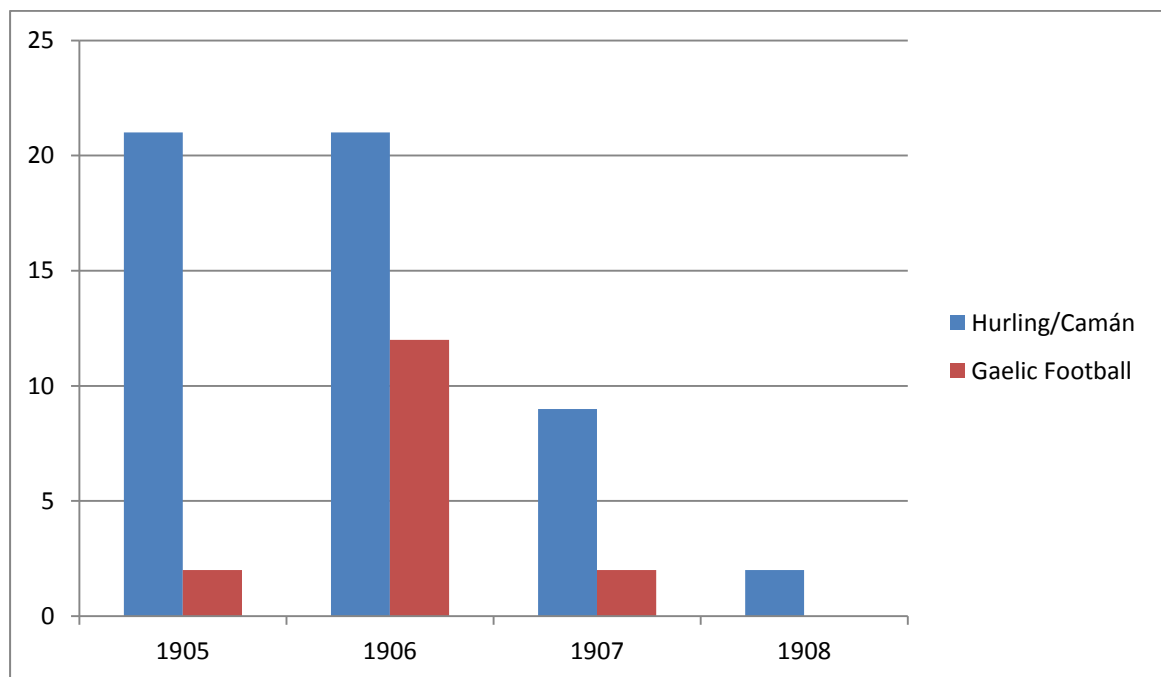


Figure 4.3: Gaelic football and hurling club matches in Donegal, 1905-8. Source: *DJ, DI, DV and DP and DN, 1905-8.*

As can be seen in figure 4.3, in the period from July 1905 until August 1908 Donegal GAA clubs were involved in at least sixty-nine matches. Two additional hurling exhibition matches were played in Donegal by Derry and Tyrone teams. Fifty-three of these Donegal games were camán or hurling and sixteen were Gaelic football. 1906 was the peak year of activity with thirty-three GAA matches played. It appears that hurling was the preferred code amongst Derry clubs at the time as indicated by reports of Lámh Dearg, Letterkenny and Newtowncunningham Harps who were affiliated to the North-west hurling league in 1905

<sup>18</sup> De Burca, *The GAA: A History*, p.73.

and 1906. Donegal's southern clubs normally played camán or commons. This was noted after Burt Hibernians' defeat of Ardaghey Old Celts in the county final of 1906 when it was recorded that the latter team had struggled to adapt to the grass field in Letterkenny.<sup>19</sup> This also suggests a difficulty in securing playing fields in the southern region. The Burt team were clearly used to a faster type of game as indicated in a later interview with one of their players.<sup>20</sup> Certainly prior to the founding of the west county board in October 1905 there is evidence that the scoring system was still measured by the number of hails scored rather than goals and points and traditional equipment such as camáns and a bool was used, which again illustrates the slow evolution of hurling in Donegal.<sup>21</sup>

Thirty-five of the camán/hurling games were of a competitive nature while seventeen were challenge matches and one was unspecified. This indicates a shift in the nature of matches from those preferred by the early Donegal GAA clubs where the number of challenge matches played outweighed the number of competitive fixtures in the late 1880s/early 1890s. The majority of 1905-8 games were between Donegal teams although the Letterkenny and Newtowncunningham teams' involvement with the Derry county board meant that of the overall total of sixty-nine, Derry teams were involved in at least twelve of their fixtures. An exhibition hurling match between two Derry clubs was played at Rathmullan in September 1905 and Derry and Tyrone clubs participated in the Grand Camán Parade but there was less reliance on Derry clubs for instruction at this stage. It appears that the Donegal clubs present at the parade took part in the march as a show of strength but did not partake in any matches.<sup>22</sup> This decrease in reliance on Derry clubs' opposition can be explained by Donegal having its own GAA county board and the increasing number and

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<sup>19</sup>*DJ*, 18 July 1906.

<sup>20</sup>Donal Campbell, Damian Dowds and Damian Mullan, *Against The Grain: A History of Burt, its People and the GAA* (Burt, 2000), p.87.

<sup>21</sup>See *DP and DN*, 8 and 29 July 1905. For an overview of these traditional rules see P.S. Mac a Ghoill, 'Cross-country Hurling in Ardara', in *CLG Ard a' Ratha* (Ardara, 1980), pp 53-7.

<sup>22</sup>*DP and DN*, 14 Oct. 1905.

change in the geographical spread of clubs, as the GAA as an organisation grew from having a handful of clubs in a concentrated region in Inishowen to the north-west, east, south and south-west of the county. In the south of the county at Bundoran, there was also a small amount of involvement from hurling clubs in Leitrim and Cavan which highlights the fact that this Donegal club was in some ways isolated from areas further north, but still managed to participate in the leagues organised by the west division.

At least sixteen Gaelic football matches were played between 1905 and 1908 with eleven of these competitive, while five friendlies were recorded. Although actual figures were probably higher due to underreporting, they do illustrate the popularity of hurling and camán over Gaelic football in Donegal at the time and most notably, they indicate the problems with the dissemination of the latter sport in the county. Twenty-one camán/hurling matches were played by Donegal clubs in 1905 and this was the same number for these codes as 1906. However the majority of these played in 1906 were competitive as opposed to challenge matches the previous year before competitions were in full swing. By 1907 the figure of camán/hurling matches had decreased to ten with the collapse of clubs and organisational structures and fell as low as two in 1908. As noted in chapter two, pre-codified forms of hurling had been in existence in Donegal since the eighteenth century while association football was firmly established in many areas by 1905 and this helps explain the popularity of hurling over Gaelic football. 1906 was the peak year of overall activity with thirty-three GAA matches played. As only two Gaelic football matches were played in 1905 and two in 1907, 1906 was also the year in which the majority of Gaelic football matches (twelve) were played. In 1908 it appears that no Gaelic football matches involving Donegal clubs took place which illustrates the total decline of this sport by then. The predominance of forms of hurling over Gaelic football is in fact a reflection of the 1888-92 figures where hurling was the preferred code, although it must also be noted that back to back fixtures between two clubs

had lessened greatly, probably due to the fact that leagues were not run simultaneously and that only a small number of clubs fielded both Gaelic football and hurling teams.

Dónal McAnallen has noted a number of problems the GAA in Ulster faced in this decade. These included opposition to Sunday games by the clergy of the Catholic Church and Sabbatarians, the refusal of the Great Northern Railway to facilitate the GAA, and competition with soccer. Problems gaining access to pitches and facilities also affected some counties.<sup>23</sup> While there is only minimal evidence of attempts to prevent Sunday matches in Donegal and none of any conflict with the train company, this overall state of affairs did little to help the growth of the GAA in Donegal as the Ulster GAA Council was not in a very prosperous state and was poorly organised at the time.<sup>24</sup>

There were a number of more localised problems which impeded the GAA's development in Donegal. The organisation of matches and competitions proved difficult in both divisions. Matches were not played on a weekly basis and this undoubtedly hampered progress. Initial fixtures organised by the eastern division were staggered with gaps over a five week period.<sup>25</sup> By February 1906 one reporter claimed that in the west division 'the hurling competitions in this division are going on slowly. It will be a long time before the final match is played.'<sup>26</sup> Some clubs had difficulties fielding teams. The Lámh Dearg camán club of Mountcharles had only played one match by April 1906 and this was said to have been due to 'the want of players.'<sup>27</sup> The following month the eastern division delegates passed a motion 'to reduce the number of players from 17 to 15 in county and league matches

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<sup>23</sup> McAnallen 'Cén Fáth a Raibh Cúige Uladh Chomh Lag Chomh Fada Sin?', pp 143-6.

<sup>24</sup> See *LS*, 17 May 1906.

<sup>25</sup> *DP and DN*, 30 Dec. 1905.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Feb. 1906 and *DJ*, 12 Feb. 1906. This progress was said to be even worse in the eastern division at this time.

<sup>27</sup> See *DP and DN*, 21 April and 5 May 1906.



in the event of this being found necessary.<sup>28</sup> Getting enough men together on a regular basis for matches proved problematic for a number of clubs within the county and may have led to the decline and inactivity of some clubs. This is perhaps unsurprising given the rural nature of a number of these Donegal clubs and the low population rates in comparison with bigger towns and cities in the country.

The eastern division chose to play their Gaelic football and hurling leagues simultaneously and began in December 1905.<sup>29</sup> Not every club played both codes and this difference in organisation caused some problems in the selection of the County Donegal Gaelic football team to play Derry in the Ulster Gaelic football championship on St Patrick's Day 1906.<sup>30</sup> The Donegal team heavily beaten by Derry was hastily made up of players from clubs in Gweedore, Fahan, Newtowncunningham, (east division), and Mountcharles and Bundoran (west division) which illustrates the lack of development in the county with Gaelic football at this stage.<sup>31</sup> Details regarding the eastern Gaelic football final are unclear while the western final does not appear to have been decided until 1907, with Balldearg noted as the winners in the press.<sup>32</sup> The final was abandoned twice in 1906 due to the incursions of the tide on the strand when the initial match, held in October and the replay, staged much later in December, were in progress, which indicates a difficulty securing a proper venue and poor timekeeping.<sup>33</sup> While delays between matches were quite common in those days within the GAA, these factors were not beneficial to development as interest would have waned without weekly matches. Poor punctuality was also said to be a hindrance. At a western division

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<sup>28</sup>*DP and DN*, 12 May 1906. See also *DJ*, 27 April 1906. The previous month Lámh Dearg of Letterkenny could only get thirteen players to make the journey to Gweedore for their Gaelic football match.

<sup>29</sup>*DJ*, 29 Dec. 1905.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 14 March 1906. It was reported at the western board meeting at the beginning of March that nearly all the clubs that had been asked to select their best players 'could not see their way to send any members, as they had been engaged all the time to the camán, and had given no time to Gaelic football. The Gweedore team was a notable exception.'

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 19 March 1906.

<sup>32</sup>*DP and DN*, 2 June, 7 July and 9 Nov. 1906. Both Killybegs and Bundoran appear to have withdrawn early in the competition and were replaced by teams from Dunkineely and Croagh.

<sup>33</sup>See *DI*, 26 Oct. and 21 Dec. 1906.

meeting in September 1906, new president Reverend Hugh Gallagher urged the necessity of an improvement in punctuality, 'both at meetings and athletic fixtures.'<sup>34</sup>

Clearly it was difficult to bring all areas of the county together and there is some evidence to suggest a lack co-operation which may have resulted from cultural boundaries and an 'us and them' attitude. Poor communications between the two divisions were not conducive to the development of the organisation and this problem was highlighted at the western board's meeting in October 1906. Concerns were expressed by national school teacher and chairman Edward Daly regarding the lack of communication between the eastern committee and their own board. It was stated that 'on every occasion when a move was made by this side to fraternise with the eastern section their advances were either treated with contempt or totally disregarded.'<sup>35</sup> There is some evidence to back up his view. In May 1906 the clubs of Burt Hibernians, Newtowncunningham Hibernians, St Mura's and Lámh Dearg agreed to pay their affiliation fees to the east Donegal county board, 'but to recognise no other authority in the county.'<sup>36</sup> There appears to have been some controversy over whom should receive the affiliation fees with the western board secretary Alex McDyer later stating that he would let the eastern board control this as 'an arrangement where the responsibility was divided would be liable to lead to disagreement.'<sup>37</sup> The six members present at the October meeting agreed unanimously to separate from the eastern division as they believed that 'the present arrangement interfered more or less with freedom of movement.'<sup>38</sup> There is no evidence that plans illustrated by the western board to hold a general meeting for all GAA delegates in the county at the Aonach an Dúin festival in Letterkenny in July bore any fruit.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>*DP and DN*, 13 Oct. 1906.

<sup>35</sup>*DI*, 19 Oct. 1906.

<sup>36</sup>*DP and DN*, 12 May 1906.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 19 May 1906.

<sup>38</sup>*DI*, 19 Oct. 1906.

<sup>39</sup>*DJ*, 6 July 1906.

As McAnallen has noted, at a higher level, support from the Ulster Council in developing the games appear to have been poor.<sup>40</sup> In Donegal, the relationship between those involved in positions of office in the east and west county boards and those in the Ulster GAA Council is hard to establish given the lack of evidence in the archives of either organisation for this early period. It is clear that a number of delegates were appointed for each division and efforts were made to attend these provincial meetings.<sup>41</sup> However one problem was the failure of the Ulster board to hold any of their monthly meetings in Donegal. This was highlighted at the eastern county board's meeting in April 1906 when secretary, Johnnie Dowds, was instructed to write to the secretary of the Ulster Council, George Martin, in the hope that the next meeting would be held in Letterkenny as the committee thought 'it unreasonable having all their meetings outside Donegal.'<sup>42</sup> Three years later this request still had not been granted.<sup>43</sup> Funding does not appear to have been forthcoming to the Donegal organisation and, as will be seen in chapter six, this lack of support was not conducive to the promotion of Gaelic games in the county. At their meeting in April 1907, the Fermanagh GAA county board were critical of the lack of finance given to them by the Ulster GAA council and claimed that 'a loss was shown in Donegal too.'<sup>44</sup> Given the importance of finance in the running of sporting clubs, the level of finance available to the GAA clubs in Donegal did little to maintain them or the divisional boards to which they were affiliated. There is certainly evidence that this provincial council was experiencing financial difficulty around this time and that county boards in Derry and Tyrone also struggled to maintain their status in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> McAnallen, 'Cén Fáth a Raibh Cúige Uladh Chomh Lag Chomh Fada Sin?', p.146.

<sup>41</sup> *DP and DN*, 18 Nov. 1905.

<sup>42</sup> *DJ*, 6 April 1906.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1908.

<sup>44</sup> *DI*, 3 May 1907.

<sup>45</sup> McAnallen, 'Cén Fáth a Raibh Cúige Uladh Chomh Lag Chomh Fada Sin?', pp 143-5.

Other more localised problems with administration were also apparent. The absence of ‘delegates from the country’ was noted at the western board’s October 1906 meeting but it was hoped that this was simply due to difficulties in attending Saturday meetings.<sup>46</sup> A re-organisation letter circulated by the Western Board secretary Alex McDyer, in November 1906 illustrated the problems in gathering attendees at meetings and dealing with protests.<sup>47</sup> A camán league did take place in 1907 with Sinn Féin, Bundoran, defeating Ardaghey in the western final in July but little has been recorded about the other clubs’ matches that season.<sup>48</sup> Evidence of club activities in the Eastern division around this time is also scarce.<sup>49</sup> The camán league recommenced for the 1906-7 season on December 9 when Lámh Dearg defeated newly affiliated Inch Emeralds in a well attended match.<sup>50</sup> It appears that Burt won the East Donegal hurling championship for 1907 as they went on to play against Bundoran Sinn Féin for the county championship. This match was won by the latter team but they received little attention in the local press at the time.<sup>51</sup> It is difficult to establish who were the eastern Gaelic football champions for 1907 or if this competition was even held. Indeed there is no evidence that any clubs other than Inch Emeralds became affiliated for the 1906-7 season. This decline was mirrored in the western division. A Gaelic football match organized by the western county board was held between Balldearg and Dunkineely in November 1907 and a small number of camán matches took place in Bundoran in 1908 but it is clear at this

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<sup>46</sup>*DI*, 19 Oct. 1906.

<sup>47</sup>*DJ*, 16 Feb. 1934. This letter was published much later as part of a ‘Gleanings by Spur’ column. McDyer recommended the appointing of deputy delegates by clubs so that they would attend divisional meetings if chief delegates could not appear and that delegates would hold their positions for ‘at least three years.’ Protests were to be allowed to accumulate until quarterly meetings and witnesses from each club involved in these disputes were to be examined.

<sup>48</sup>*DV*, 26 July 1907.

<sup>49</sup>*DJ*, 28 Nov. 1906. An exception was a ‘monster’ tournament organised for 26 December in Newtowncunningham.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 Dec. 1906.

<sup>51</sup>Campbell, Dowds and Mullan, *Against the Grain*, p.93.

stage that both divisions had collapsed.<sup>52</sup> Of critical importance to the decline of the GAA in Donegal at this point was the loss of organizers.

The lack of instruction from central sporting agencies towards the development of sport in Donegal is a key element of this thesis. The man responsible for organising the initial county board meeting, and chief organiser of the GAA in the county, Seumas MacManus, was not involved by 1907 and was showing more interest in his literary career in the United States.<sup>53</sup> Significantly no new clubs appear to have been affiliated after 1906 and without MacManus' influence in organising them, this is perhaps unsurprising. The number of GAA clubs did not grow sufficiently for the association to gain a proper foothold as not every parish was able to or eager to organise their own GAA club. The role of the Catholic Church in the decline of the GAA in Donegal at this time will be addressed in chapter six. The west county board also lost vice-president P.A. Mooney who passed away in June 1907.<sup>54</sup> This loss and withdrawal of initial officers and supporters no doubt contributed to the decline of the playing of Gaelic games in the county. The GAA, after MacManus' departure, certainly lacked any public figures with social influence and affluence to promote the games in the way that he had attempted. This can be compared to events in County Kerry. The GAA in Kerry enjoyed a revival in the early 1900s, largely due to the organisational and propagandist efforts of T.F. O'Sullivan. Although he was transferred to Dublin in 1907, his role as chief organiser was taken over by Austin Stack, who proved a more than effective replacement.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, with the loss of MacManus, Donegal had nobody with the drive and personality to promote Gaelic games and this continued to be the case until 1919.

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<sup>52</sup>*DV*, 8 Nov. 1907 and *DI*, 19 June and 7 Aug. 1908.

<sup>53</sup>See *DI*, 19 Oct. 1906 and *DJ*, 20 Nov. 1908. MacManus' absence from the west division meeting was noted in October 1906. He was by then engaged in lectures in the United States and by November 1908 had been made a professor of literature at Notre Dame University.

<sup>54</sup>*DJ*, 14 June 1906.

<sup>55</sup>Richard McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom: The Establishment and Development of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Kerry, 1884-1924', unpublished Ph.D thesis, University College Dublin, 2011, pp 130-2, p.160 and p.163.

## II 1908-1919

Problems continued within the Ulster GAA Council into the second decade of the twentieth century. Disputes regarding the hosting of meetings and match results were commonplace and the fact that Ulster Council meetings were mainly held in the counties of Antrim, Monaghan and Cavan continued to be a cause of concern to other Ulster counties.<sup>56</sup> Donegal remained isolated from these activities for much of this decade. One Derry GAA official claimed in 1915 that a lack of trophies and insufficient popular support were responsible for the lack of success of the GAA in his county.<sup>57</sup> In Donegal, it was the latter which proved most problematic. While this period was generally one of great inactivity in the formation of clubs and organising committees in Donegal, there were a small number of localised attempts to reorganise Gaelic games on a competitive basis in the years from 1910 until 1914. Despite the donation of a number of trophies, these attracted little interest, mainly due to a dearth of clubs. The Assaroe cup was initially donated by Henry J. Toal, an Inland Revenue Officer, to the Aodh Ruadh club in March 1910 for Gaelic football purposes.<sup>58</sup> However, this competition had not been organised by the following October as ‘there being no teams within a reasonable travelling distance the idea had to be abandoned.’<sup>59</sup> Another difficulty was the prominence of the Woods soccer cup in the Ballyshannon area at the time and the general popularity of association football over the Gaelic code throughout the county.

With this lack of interest, it was then decided to contact a number of hurling teams. A hurling competition finally began in June 1911 but with only three Donegal teams taking

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<sup>56</sup> McAnallen, ‘Cén Fáth a Raibh Cúige Uladh Chomh Lag Chomh Fada Sin?’, p.146.

<sup>57</sup> *DJ*, 12 Feb. 1915.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 April 1910.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 Oct. 1910.

part, Ardagh, Tír Conaill (Letterkenny) and Aodh Ruadh (Ballyshannon).<sup>60</sup> In fact, outside of these teams, the Aodh Ruadh club had to be content with friendly hurling matches against only four other clubs, three of these being based in Leitrim and the other in Fermanagh, while Gaelic football in the Ballyshannon area also suffered from an absence of teams.<sup>61</sup> There is no evidence that the Assaroe cup was held again in 1912 and Aodh Ruadh claimed at their AGM held in October 1911 that they found away games difficult as travelling was awkward for some players.<sup>62</sup> Other cups offered for competition in 1911, 1913 and 1914 attracted little interest.<sup>63</sup> Clearly soccer was the preferred choice of sport at this point, and easier to organise. Given the lack of nearby Donegal clubs and Ballyshannon's geographical position, with a close proximity to the Leitrim border, it was at times easier to travel to play Leitrim clubs and the Aodh Ruadh club did this in 1915 with a small number of hurling and Gaelic football matches against Leitrim clubs.<sup>64</sup> Relations between these clubs were positive with the Ballyshannon (and later the Bundoran branch) joining the Leitrim county board in May 1917.<sup>65</sup>

The precise scale of Donegal GAA involvement in the First World War is difficult to establish given the lack of contemporary accounts of GAA recruitment. Jim MacLaughlin has stated that 'an estimated 8,000 Donegal men served in World War I' so it is also likely that some GAA members participated.<sup>66</sup> Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have stated that 'thousands of GAA members' followed the call of John Redmond to enlist in the British army and have noted the collapse of clubs such as Killaloe GAA club in County Clare as a

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<sup>60</sup>*DV*, 14 June 1911.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 Oct. 1911.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 11 Nov. 1911 and 24 Feb. 1913 and *DP and DN*, 9 May 1914.

<sup>64</sup>See for example, *DV*, 26 March, 28 April 1915 and 20 Aug. 1915.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 1 June 1917 and 14 Dec. 1917.

<sup>66</sup>Jim MacLaughlin, 'Introduction: The Making of a Northern County', in Jim MacLaughlin (ed.), *Donegal: The Making of a Northern County* (Dublin, 2007) pp 1-21, p.5.

result of this.<sup>67</sup> 1916 was a pivotal year in Ireland's fight for independence. The Easter Rising saw Patrick Pearse lead a rebellion of around 1,200 members of the Volunteers, Irish Citizen Army and Irish Republican Brotherhood against the British forces.<sup>68</sup> While this uprising was generally centred in Dublin and lasted only a week, a republic was declared by Pearse and public opinion swayed against the British with his execution and that of thirteen others. Added to this, the arrests of 3,419 people around the country and their treatment ensured 'a scale of resentment against British rule in Ireland which was unprecedented.'<sup>69</sup>

One GAA writer, in a review of the Donegal county board, claimed in 1923 that 'the year 1916, with its strong Irish spirit, was responsible for the growth of Gaelic football' in Donegal.<sup>70</sup> While there may have been a rise in the number of Gaelic football selections which appeared in 1916, by the following year the figure had decreased. In 1915 there were four of these operating in the county. This had risen to ten in 1916 but the following year the figure had dropped to seven.<sup>71</sup> This does not suggest any significant overall growth at this time. William Murphy has concluded that 'the overwhelming majority of those who fought in 1916 were not members of the GAA.'<sup>72</sup> Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have estimated the number of GAA members who participated in the fighting to be around 350.<sup>73</sup> Certainly Donegal's involvement at Easter 1916 was minimal. While this can be explained by the fact

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<sup>67</sup>Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People's History*, p.148.

<sup>68</sup>Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, p.141.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p.154.

<sup>70</sup>*DJ*, 14 Sept. 1923.

<sup>71</sup>See *DJ*, 24 March, 5 July 1915 and *DI*, 3 April 1915. There were two teams located in Letterkenny, while Burt and Fahan also fielded Gaelic football selections in 1915. See *DP and DN*, 18 March 1916 and *DJ*, 14 April, 26 July, 2 Aug., 27 Oct. 1916 and 3 Jan. 1917 and Crawford and McCool (eds.) *Golden Memories*, pp 2-4. Teams were located in Letterkenny, Burt, Killea, Newtowncunningham, Buncrana, Bridgend, Ballybofey, Stranorlar, Ballyshannon and Ballintra in 1916. See *DJ*, 23 Feb., 2 and 16 March, 6 April 1917; *DI*, 21 April 1917 and *DV*, 25 May 1917. In 1917 there were teams noted in Killea, Buncrana, Burt, Newtowncunningham, Ballybofey, Stranorlar and Ballyshannon. In April 1917 Burt and Newtowncunningham Harps withdrew from the Derry Gaelic football league 'as they intended to confine themselves solely to hurling' while Ballintra returned to soccer having played only one Gaelic football match in 1916 and were said to have played their eleventh soccer game of the season by May 1917.

<sup>72</sup>William Murphy, 'The GAA during the Irish Revolution' in Mike Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse (eds.) *The Gaelic Athletic Association 1884-2009* (Dublin, 2009), pp 61-76, p.67.

<sup>73</sup>Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People's History*, p.151.



that the majority of fighting took place in Dublin, the IRB movement in the county was weak and Ernst Blythe has provided an account of the difficulties he encountered in his recruitment efforts at the end of 1914. He struggled to find sufficient numbers interested and has stated that 'I should say that in the course of four or five weeks that I did not swear in more than twenty men all told, if so many.'<sup>74</sup> Blythe has also stated that Bishop O'Donnell's support for the Irish Parliamentary Party 'may have given public opinion a special slant' and felt that 'economics may have been a factor' in the lack of support he encountered.<sup>75</sup> Donegal's involvement was therefore restricted to a handful of men in Dublin including Joe Sweeney, who would go on to help organise the county board in 1919. A mix up in communications meant that thirty-three Volunteers who had mobilised at Creeslough took no part.<sup>76</sup> It is not unreasonable to suggest that there was no involvement of any Donegal GAA clubs in the Rising and there is little evidence that any were formed as a direct result of nationalist fervour created by events in Dublin at this time.

In July 1918 GAA matches, seen by the RIC as prospective political gatherings rather than sporting events, came under increasing pressure from the government when it was announced that public meetings would require permits. However, the GAA chose to defy this and ordered its clubs not to apply for these or its members to play in matches where permits had been granted.<sup>77</sup> Evidence of trouble arising from this in Donegal is minimal. That same month there were claims that a Ballyshannon-Kinlough hurling match had gone ahead in Bundoran after the venue had been switched to confuse the RIC who had stated that it would be stopped by force but there is little evidence of interference in other matches held during

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<sup>74</sup>Earnan De Blaghd, 'Organising the IRB in Donegal' in *Donegal Annual 1966*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Donegal, 1966), pp 41-4, p. 44.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>76</sup> Liam Ó Duibhir, *The Donegal Awakening : Donegal and the War of Independence* (Dublin, 2009), pp 39-40.

<sup>77</sup>De Burca, *The GAA: A History*, p.111.

July.<sup>78</sup> A sports day, consisting of ‘Gaelic football, dancing and foot races’ organised by the Seán McDermott Sinn Féin club, Frosses, was held on 7 July after suggestions by a police sergeant and two constables that it be postponed and a permit obtained were ignored.<sup>79</sup> Despite calls from the Central Council for mass participation in Gaelic games on Sunday, 4 August 1918, there are no press reports of Donegal GAA clubs’ involvement in Gaelic Sunday.<sup>80</sup> De Burca has stated that this event was ‘the greatest single act of defiance outside the purely political sphere between 1916 and 1922’ with almost 100,000 taking part.<sup>81</sup> This event allowed matches to again go ahead without restrictions and Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have stated that it ‘linked the GAA to the gathering momentum of radical nationalism which led to the election victory of Sinn Féin in 1918.’<sup>82</sup>

Given the small number of clubs operating in the county at the time, it is unsurprising that there was no wide scale organisation in Donegal. It also highlights how the GAA in Donegal was not operating in ways envisaged by the Central Council. However this government prohibition of Gaelic games may have brought about a slight rise in nationalist feeling in South Donegal GAA circles. A Gaelic football tournament involving teams from Donegal town, Ballyshannon, Bundoran, Mountcharles, Frosses, Ballintra and Killybegs was held in Donegal town on 25 August 1918 and drew no interference from the authorities despite the ‘good crowd’ present.<sup>83</sup> The Aodh Ruadh club hosted another of these gatherings at the end of October and again there were no attempts to prevent this despite a police patrol being present nearby.<sup>84</sup> It is clear that Donegal remained on the periphery of these more centralised GAA trends and external intervention was required in order to spark the GAA into action on a wider scale within the county.

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<sup>78</sup>DV, 26 July 1918.

<sup>79</sup>DP and DN, 13 July 1918.

<sup>80</sup>DI, 3 Aug. 1918.

<sup>81</sup> De Burca, *The GAA: A History*, p.112.

<sup>82</sup>Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People’s History*, p.152.

<sup>83</sup>DV, 30 Aug. 1918.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 4 Oct. 1918.

### III 1919-34

It was during this period that the GAA in Donegal finally was established on a permanent basis. 1919 was a significant year in that county board meetings and competitive matches were again organised and this time they were continued annually. This change was begun at the Ulster GAA Convention in Derry on 16 March 1919. Secretary Eoin O'Duffy, a native of Monaghan, was instructed to take the necessary steps to form a county board for Donegal and after the Convention, Donegal representatives Curran, Rodden, Fullerton and McGovern met and decided to hold this foundation meeting in Strabane, County Tyrone early the following month.<sup>85</sup> This was the first time any significant decisive action had been taken since the 1905-7 period and prior to this meeting O'Duffy noted the failure of those interested in forming a county board to maintain enthusiasm for this despite his encouragement.<sup>86</sup> Other areas in Ulster such as Tyrone and Down were also in need of reorganisation around this time.<sup>87</sup>

Initially there was strong political backing for the new Donegal county board with Sinn Féin members heavily involved in the meeting which took place at the Barrack Street Hall, Strabane on 3 April 1919.<sup>88</sup> This was chaired by O'Duffy with Sam O'Flaherty appointed president. Members of the Dáil, P.J. Ward and Joseph Sweeney were named vice-presidents along with Dr J.P. McGinley. John Curran of Letterkenny was named county secretary while Patrick McCartan, Donegal town, became treasurer.<sup>89</sup> However, McGinley's influence in the GAA in the following years seemed to dwindle in comparison to his political and professional career while O'Flaherty was later sacked from his position as president after

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<sup>85</sup>Ulster GAA Council Minutes, Volume 1, Ulster GAA Convention 1919 Minutes, 16 March 1919.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., Secretary's Report to the Ulster GAA Provincial Council, 16 March 1919.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., Ulster GAA Council Meeting Minutes, 12 April 1919.

<sup>88</sup>*DJ*, 11 April 1919.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.,

it was stated in 1923 that he had taken no part in the county board ‘for a considerable time.’<sup>90</sup> Given that O’Duffy later became Garda Commissioner his involvement in the GAA in Donegal seemed to have been limited to official duties such as throwing in the ball at the Ulster championship match between Donegal and Derry in 1923 but it was he, as secretary of the Ulster Council, who was largely responsible for the revival of the GAA in Ulster at this time.<sup>91</sup> His early influence in the GAA in Donegal can also be seen in that at a county board meeting on Sunday 4 May 1919 ‘the bye-laws of the Monaghan county board were provisionally adopted, the interpretation of them being left to the discretion of the county board.’<sup>92</sup> Ward was president for a number of years but like McGinley by the middle of the 1920s was no longer involved in the county board. Both these men seem more interested in their professional careers at this point.

It was in the early 1920s that a small group of men based in the south and south-west of the county began to exert more control over the administration of the board and it was in these areas that the playing of Gaelic games grew in strength. In fact, in the period from 1925 until 1934, only one man from outside these areas, Michael Dawson from Letterkenny, was elected chairman, and his tenure lasted only briefly.<sup>93</sup> An analysis of the positions of secretary and treasurer also illustrate the dominance of officials from the south-west and south, with only four men from outside these regions taking up the position of secretary in this nine year period, while Seán Conaghan from Glenties was elected treasurer for each of these years.<sup>94</sup> At a meeting of the county board held in May 1923, it was agreed that three centres, Letterkenny, Ballybofey and Donegal town, would be used as venues for these

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<sup>90</sup>DD, 25 March 1923.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 22 June 1923.

<sup>92</sup>DP and DN, 10 May 1919.

<sup>93</sup>DD, 12 April 1930.

<sup>94</sup> An tAth. Seán Ó Gallachoir, *The Raidio na Gaeltachta Book of Donegal GAA Facts* [Third edition] (Letterkenny, 1996), p.97.

meetings, with regular alteration between them.<sup>95</sup> This also undoubtedly isolated clubs outside these areas, while strengthening the influence of those based nearby.

The Donegal county board began to meet on a regular basis after it was re-founded. At first, its delegates appeared preoccupied with organising the selection of a county team for competition in the Ulster Gaelic football championship of 1919.<sup>96</sup> There was no major interest shown by the public and initial numbers of delegates present at meetings were low. After the second meeting in Ballybofey at the end of April, it was reported that the 'poor attendance of club delegates rendered the business of the meeting of a routine character.'<sup>97</sup> At a meeting on 4 May 1919 in Donegal town, a decision was taken which it was hoped would help the overall structure of the GAA in the county in that district leagues were to be established. It was decided that six districts would be formed. These were South Donegal, which contained the areas of Bundoran, Ballyshannon, Frosses, Ballintra and Donegal town while Kinlough (Leitrim) and Belleek (Fermanagh) were also included. The South-west district covered Kilcar, Glencolumbkille, Carrick, Rosbeg, Killybegs, Ardara, Glenties and Lettermacaward. The West Donegal district included Burtonport, Annagry, Gweedore, Gortahork and Falcarragh. Further north, the North-west area comprised of Creeslough, Termon, Carrigart, Glen, Rosnakill, Kerrykeel, Ramelton, Milford and Rathmullan. North Donegal (or Inishowen) contained Burt, Fahan, Buncrana, Clonmany, Malin, Carndonagh and Culdaff. Areas such as Letterkenny, Castlefin and Killygordon were named in the Eastern division.<sup>98</sup> It was intended that the winners of each division, played on a league basis, would meet in the latter stages of the county championship on a knock out basis.

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<sup>95</sup>*DD*, 25 May 1923.

<sup>96</sup>*DJ*, 2 May 1919.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>98</sup>*DP and DN*, 10 May 1919.

Given earlier transport problems, this looked like a practical and sensible solution. However, in 1919 clubs were not organised in all of these areas and by 1923 the plan was said to have been unsuccessful as ‘owing to the apathy of the members of the county committee...and the unfavourable situation of some districts, nothing resulted from this scheme.’<sup>99</sup> This was not exactly correct. In the south, the teams of Aodh Ruadh and Bundoran were in action by May 1919 and were joined in their district league by Donegal town, Drimarone and Kinlough from County Leitrim.<sup>100</sup> The eastern division was also operational by June with three Donegal clubs from Letterkenny, Castlefin, Killygordon and two Tyrone clubs, Clady and Rabstown all participating on a league basis.<sup>101</sup> At this point these were the only leagues organised and divisional winners, Bundoran and Killygordon, met in the county championship final on 4 January 1920, although Bundoran were not declared the winners until 2 May after a number of protests and two replays.<sup>102</sup>

Given that Gaelic football was a relatively new sport in most areas of the county in 1919, adapting to it proved difficult for many players. After Bundoran had beaten Letterkenny in September 1919, it was reported that ‘sometimes tackling was a bit slow, but it must be remembered that the teams have only recently begun Gaelic.’<sup>103</sup> Movement was at times hampered by a lack of proper playing kit as illustrated in a 1920 East Donegal match which ‘would have been much brisker, had not so many of the players been wrapped up in their long clothes.’<sup>104</sup> Gaelic football players’ failure to master the skills required was also a source of discontent to GAA writers. Given that both soccer and Gaelic football were in some ways similar, cross-over of kicking and ball-carrying techniques was always going to be demonstrated by Gaelic football players who had experience of the other code. The

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<sup>99</sup>*DJ*, 31 Aug. 1923.

<sup>100</sup>See *DV*, 23 May, 8 Aug. 1919 and *DD*, 4 July 1919.

<sup>101</sup>See *DJ*, 18 June and 29 Aug. 1919.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 May 1920.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 19 Sept. 1919.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 Nov. 1919.

players of Donegal town were frequently criticised for displaying soccer skills in their play in 1919.<sup>105</sup> This changeover was a slow process and was problematic even at inter-county level where players were supposed to be of a higher standard. As late as May 1924 the Donegal county selection that lost to Tyrone were said to be suffering from ‘that fatal tendency to play soccer instead of Gaelic.’<sup>106</sup> Officials also struggled to conduct matters and the standard of refereeing was sometimes poor. This was understandable given the lack of experience of players and officials in Gaelic football. The performance of the referee in the Stranorlar versus Castlefin match in November 1920 was praised as it was felt that ‘his earnest manner and impartial decisions should be copied by some of the more slovenly and biased.’<sup>107</sup> The inadequate standard of refereeing was also discussed at a meeting of the South Donegal League in December 1921. It was decided to appoint officials as ‘under the existing arrangement any man was picked up, perhaps some person who did not know the rules, with the result that there was confusion.’<sup>108</sup>

The period between January 1917 and June 1923 in Ireland was marked by violence, with Peter Hart estimating that ‘well over 7,500 people were killed or wounded’ during this time.<sup>109</sup> The GAA in Donegal was not greatly affected by the War of Independence fought between the Irish Republican Army and the British forces. While GAA activity was restricted to some extent, matches continued to go ahead in 1919, 1920 and 1921 with county championships and leagues being organised in the south and east in each of these years and inter-county fixtures taking place. Admittedly, the social dislocation in the west may have had a delaying affect on the organisation of a league there. Despite the war breaking out in January 1919, it was not until December that any action was recorded in the county, and this

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<sup>105</sup>See for example, *DP and DN*, 22 March and 27 Sept 1919.

<sup>106</sup>*DV*, 24 May 1924.

<sup>107</sup>*DD*, 12 Nov. 1920.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 Dec. 1921.

<sup>109</sup>Peter Hart, ‘The Geography of Revolution in Ireland 1917-1923’ in *Past and Present*, vol. 155, no. 1 (1997) pp 142-76, p.142.

attack at Dungloe ‘was less than successful.’<sup>110</sup> Desmond Murphy believes that Sinn Féin ‘found it difficult to keep up its momentum in 1919’ in Donegal and ‘consequently the IRA grew much more slowly in Donegal than elsewhere in Ireland.’ The ‘general tranquillity’ of the county remained until ‘the late summer of 1920’ and this change only came about as a result of ‘the sudden retreat of the police from a wide area of West Donegal.’ He has also stated that ‘North and East Donegal remained calm while in South Donegal Republicans led by P.J. Ward preferred civil disobedience to armed attacks.’ Murphy has identified a number of problems faced by the IRA in West Donegal and these included a lack of well trained men, a poor supply of arms, a failure of Volunteers to obey orders and a lack of co-operation between units and their leaders. In other parts of the county, which were relatively quiet, units also ‘suffered from both poor leadership and a lack of arms.’<sup>111</sup> While dismissing the theory that a lack of weapons was a significant factor, Hart has suggested that in areas where Protestants ‘formed a large minority in conjunction with strong anti-republicans-as in Donegal or counties Dublin and Wicklow-IRA activity might well be smothered.’<sup>112</sup>

While organisational problems were not uncommon in other areas such as Mayo and Roscommon, Garvin believes that it was in Cork and Waterford where organisation was said to be best.<sup>113</sup> He also stated that the most active counties were in Munster and Cavan was also said to be heavily involved. Donegal was said to be one of the most inactive along with Kilkenny, Kildare, Mayo and Wicklow.<sup>114</sup> It is perhaps no surprise then that the GAA was able to continue relatively unhindered in Donegal in these years. Although from the summer of 1920 until the Truce on 11 July 1921 there were twelve deaths recorded in the county, Murphy believes that ‘the sporadic military campaign and the failure to win over already

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<sup>110</sup> Desmond Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster 1790-1921* (Derry, 1981), p.258.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 258-9.

<sup>112</sup> Hart, ‘The Geography of Revolution in Ireland’, pp 157-60. Hart believes that ‘local initiative and organisation were the deciding factor, not guns.’

<sup>113</sup> Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* [Second edition] (Dublin, 2005), pp 138-9.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p.136.



ambiguous support to the Republican cause meant that a low degree of political consciousness continued to exist in Co. Donegal right up until the Truce.<sup>115</sup>

An Ulster GAA Council reorganisation meeting was held on 22 October 1921.<sup>116</sup> This was the first meeting since May of 1920 and this in itself illustrates the level of disruption at provincial level. However, at this meeting Donegal delegates Denis Gallagher and Joe Murray were able to report on the presence of fourteen clubs in the county and that leagues were being carried out. GAA activity in counties Monaghan and Armagh had stalled but this was not deemed a problem as it was felt that they could quickly be reorganised. Tyrone was also said to be inactive but in Derry, Fermanagh, Cavan and Down, championships were going ahead and the Council ordered that the 1921 Gaelic football championships be played at once.<sup>117</sup> As William Murphy has noted, disruption in the GAA at this time varied from moderate inconvenience in Dublin to severe restriction in Kilkenny and Tipperary.<sup>118</sup> It is difficult to establish the exact amount of involvement of Donegal GAA members in the war and the length of disruption caused by IRA activities, but neither seems to have been substantial.

What is clear is that a number of county board officials were involved in the war. High ranking IRA men such as 1919 county board officers Joe Sweeney and P.J. Ward were arrested early in 1920 but it appears that Sweeney's involvement in the board had lessened at that stage.<sup>119</sup> Secretary John Curran was apparently 'being hunted by the British Government from post to pillar' in April 1920.<sup>120</sup> Others who later became involved in the GAA such as Joe McDevitt, who was heavily involved in the Kilcar club in 1925, and Michael Callaghan, a man fundamental to the organisation of the GAA in 1930 in Killybegs, have been identified

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<sup>115</sup>Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster*, pp 261-2.

<sup>116</sup>Ulster GAA Council Minutes, Vol. 1, Ulster Council Reorganising Meeting Minutes, 22 October 1921.

<sup>117</sup> Ulster GAA Council Minutes, Vol. 1, Ulster Council Reorganising Meeting Minutes, 22 Oct. 1921.

<sup>118</sup>William Murphy, 'The GAA during the Irish Revolution', p.74.

<sup>119</sup>Ó Duibhir, *The Donegal Awakening*, pp 126-7.

<sup>120</sup>*DP and DN*, 10 April 1920.

for their involvement.<sup>121</sup> However, the county board was able to continue and this can be seen in the fact that they condemned the imprisonment of Ward and Sweeney and that of a number of others at a meeting in May 1920 in Ballybofey.<sup>122</sup> They later expressed satisfaction with the involvement of the Falcarragh GAA club in the White Cross Fund in November 1921 and had sanctioned the visit of the Letterkenny team to play a fund raising match for this organisation in September.<sup>123</sup> A match was also held in Ballybofey in November 1921 for the Prisoners' Dependents' Fund between Donegal and Derry selections.<sup>124</sup> This type of contribution to fundraising for prisoners and their dependants was common amongst the GAA 'throughout the revolutionary period.'<sup>125</sup>

Newspaper reports indicate some instances of disruption to GAA fixtures in Donegal in 1921 caused by social dislocation but these were relatively infrequent. After the first match for the 1921-2 season played in the East Donegal league in June 1921 between Killygordon and Tyrone club Clady, it was stated that 'neither team was up to its old strengths, but each fielded a pretty good selection' which suggests some inactivity.<sup>126</sup> The imprisonment of a number of Donegal town and Killygordon players led to a decision being undertaken by the county board in September 1921 that these clubs' county final fixture for 1920-1 would be postponed until their players' return.<sup>127</sup> League fixtures did not recommence outside of the East division until later in that year but clubs, such as St

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<sup>121</sup>See *DD*, 25 Jan. 1925 and 15 Dec. 1934.

<sup>122</sup>*DJ*, 21 May 1920.

<sup>123</sup>*DJ*, 16 Sept. 1921 and 11 Nov. 1921. The White Cross fund was organised to raise money for families of Volunteers involved in the War of Independence. Tomás O Riordan, 'Hanna Sheehy Skeffington' Retrieved from [http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Hanna\\_Sheehy-Skeffington](http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Hanna_Sheehy-Skeffington) [accessed 4 Feb. 2012]

<sup>124</sup>*DJ*, 25 Nov. 1921.

<sup>125</sup>Murphy, 'The GAA during the Irish Revolution', p.70.

<sup>126</sup>*DP and DN*, 25 June 1921.

<sup>127</sup>*DD*, 16 Sept. 1921.

Patrick's, Bundoran in the south who organised a number of challenge matches against clubs further afield from July to September, did manage to persevere.<sup>128</sup>

At the end of the war there was an increase in club formation and organised competitions. This indicated a rise in support for Gaelic games and a move towards national pastimes. While GAA clubs in Bundoran, Donegal and Ballyshannon again returned to activity in November 1921, leagues were also organised in the west and south-west that winter as more rurally based clubs became involved in the Donegal GAA.<sup>129</sup> Four teams were affiliated to play in the west Tír Conaill league, these being Falcarragh, Gweedore, Kincasslagh and Derrybeg while in the south-west, a league comprising the clubs of Killybegs, Glenties and Ardara began in December.<sup>130</sup> The eastern league was not progressing very well at this stage as the organisation of the Tyrone and Tyrconnell league drew support from a number of clubs in this eastern area that same month. Despite the disbandment of this league in May 1922, the seven Donegal clubs involved had made up half of the overall figure.<sup>131</sup>

The GAA in Donegal also seems not to have been severely disrupted by the Civil War, which began in June 1922 and ended in May of the following year and was fought between the pro-Treaty Free State Army and the anti-Treaty Irish Republican Army.<sup>132</sup> The 1922-3 county championship was again played on a league basis with divisional winners meeting in the final and there is no evidence of any matches being disrupted because of GAA members' involvement.<sup>133</sup> Again it is difficult to state exactly how many players and officials were involved but there is no evidence to suggest any problems like those experienced in

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<sup>128</sup>See *DJ*, 15 and 29 July, 5, 12 and 19 Aug., 9, 16 and 30 Sept. 1921.

<sup>129</sup>*DD*, 11 Nov. 1921.

<sup>130</sup>*DD*, 2 Dec. 1921.

<sup>131</sup>*DJ*, 30 Dec. 1921. These were located in Castlefin, Ballybofey, Stranorlar, Raphoe and Murlog with some areas fielding two teams.

<sup>132</sup>Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, pp 254-5.

<sup>133</sup>See *DD*, 13 April 1923 for a report of the 1922-3 Gaelic football county final between Ardara and Ballybofey.

Kerry and Cork where inter-county teams refused to play while leading members were imprisoned.<sup>134</sup> Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have stated that ‘during 1922 and 1923 the activities of the Association were severely hampered’ and while this was clearly the case in a number of counties, in Donegal matches appear to have gone ahead relatively unhindered, and reports of county board meetings illustrate little discussion of any related problems in the county.<sup>135</sup> A reference was made in the press to the possibility that players in the east were in jail in June 1923 but little else was stated on the matter.<sup>136</sup>

While Liam Ó Duibhir has noted some important aspects of Donegal’s role in the Civil War, there is little to suggest that any GAA members or officials were heavily involved. Donegal’s elected Dáil representatives were generally in favour of the Treaty having debated this at meetings of Sinn Féin branches and area councils at the end of 1921.<sup>137</sup> There is little evidence to suggest that activity within the county greatly affected the GAA there, although in the build up to the war in April 1922 it was reported that the Bundoran team could not travel to play their county championship semi-final against Glenties as ‘the motor cars in which they were to travel had been commandeered.’<sup>138</sup> This match was not played until 20 May.<sup>139</sup> Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have stated that ‘it seems clear that by offering a neutral space for its members to play the games that they loved, irrespective of their political loyalties, the GAA played some part in fostering national reconciliation.’<sup>140</sup> Similarly, there is scarce evidence that the Association in Donegal acted in any major way in healing differences between those with diverging views on the conflict, and given the lack of activity throughout the county, this is perhaps unsurprising.

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<sup>134</sup>Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People’s History*, p.154.

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, p.154.

<sup>136</sup>*DD*, 1 June 1923.

<sup>137</sup>Liam Ó Duibhir, *Donegal and the Civil War: The Untold Story* (Cork, 2011), p. 48.

<sup>138</sup>*DD*, 21 April 1922.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 June 1922.

<sup>140</sup>Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People’s History*, p.154.



Figure 4.4: Gaelic football teams in Donegal, 1919. Source: *DD, DP and DN, DV, DJ, DI*, 1919. The teams of William Pearse's, Rabstown (Tyrone) and Kinlough (Leitrim) are excluded from the map but included in the overall tables as they participated in the Donegal county championship that year.

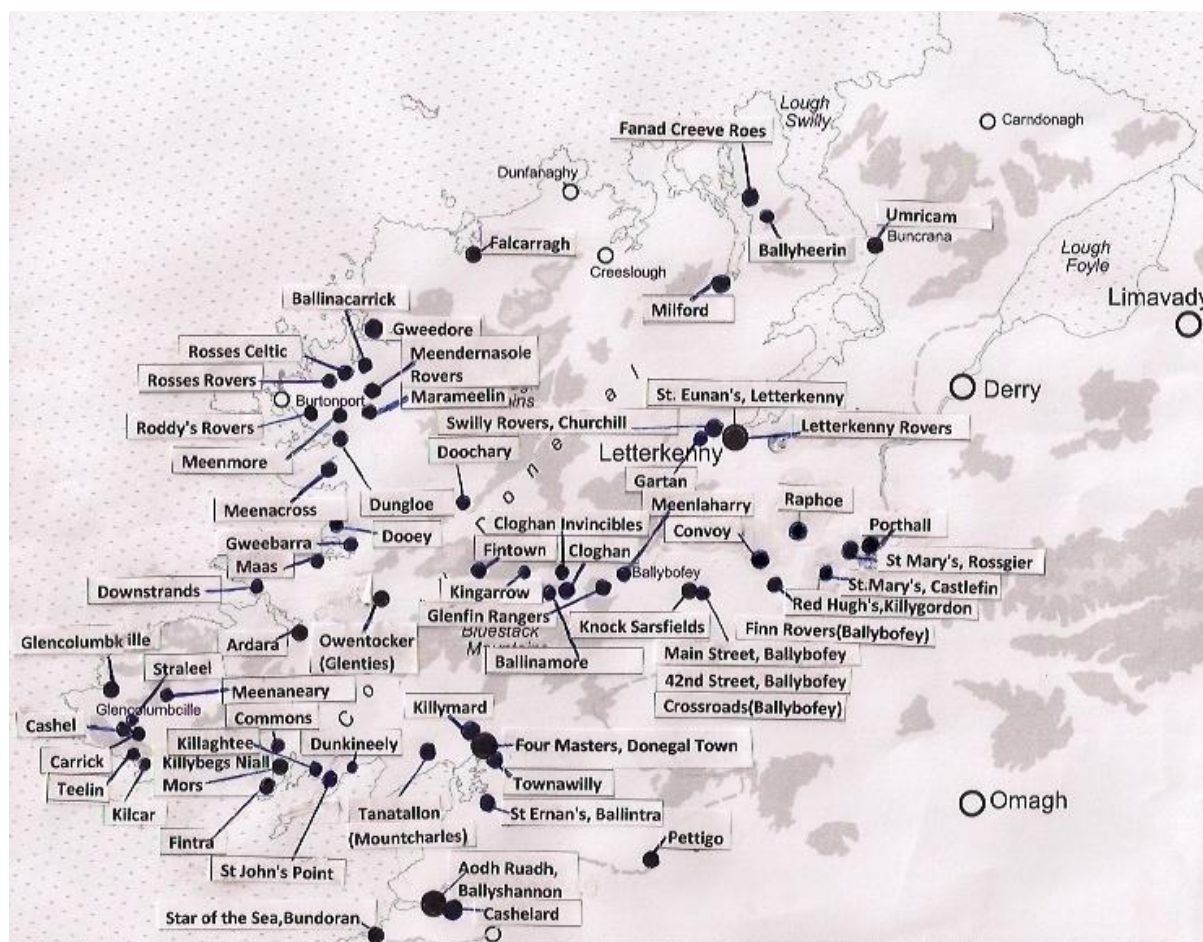


Figure 4.5: Gaelic football teams in Donegal, 1934. Source: *DD, DP and TN, DPP, DJ, DV* 1934.

As can be seen in figures 4.4 and 4.5, there was a remarkable change in the number of Gaelic football teams in operation in 1919 and 1934, particularly in the southern half of the county. While reasons for the failure of the GAA to penetrate Inishowen and the north-east will be assessed in the next chapter, the areas where Gaelic football had succeeded by 1934 will be established through an assessment of the number of clubs involved and their levels of permanency. For this purpose, the county has been divided into five areas, south, east, west, south-west and Inishowen. As can be seen in the overall tables in appendix 2, the number of Gaelic football teams participating in Donegal rose and fell throughout the 1920s, beginning with eighteen participating in 1919 and reaching a peak of thirty in 1924.<sup>141</sup> The latter figure may be partially explained by a rise in numbers in Inishowen and in the south of the county

<sup>141</sup>See Appendices 2-7 for a breakdown of Gaelic football teams by area.

that year. However, by 1929 the overall number was reduced to eighteen as factors such as emigration, finance, disputes with the county board, a lack of support and competition with soccer all affected the survival of clubs. It was not until the 1930s that these figures really began to grow annually with a rise from thirty-nine in 1930 to forty-seven teams noted in 1931. Despite a drop to forty-five in 1932, in 1934 there were at least sixty-seven teams playing Gaelic football in Donegal. How this popular support for Gaelic football was developed will be addressed later in the chapter.

Not all of these became affiliated and Donegal's figure of affiliated clubs remained low nationally. Marcus De Burca's account of affiliated clubs, taken from the Annual Congress reports for 1935, indicates that Donegal had thirty-three clubs affiliated with the Central Council. Antrim had the highest number of clubs in Ulster with fifty-seven and of the others, only Cavan (forty) and Tyrone (thirty-nine) had more clubs in the province, which had an overall total of 287. Both Derry and Fermanagh, with sixteen each, had the lowest number in Ulster.<sup>142</sup> The majority of clubs lay in Leinster (679) and Dublin, with 100 clubs, had the most in this province. However it was in Cork where the highest number of clubs was located (147) out of Munster's total of 427.<sup>143</sup>

### **South Donegal**

As illustrated in appendix 3, many clubs founded in this period experienced decline and revival in a way similar to that described by Tranter in his study of soccer clubs in nineteenth century Central Scotland when he stated that they came and went with the 'regularity of a yo-yo'.<sup>144</sup> One Donegal GAA writer felt that by 1924, 'owing to the unsettled nature of the county, some clubs have ceased to exist, others are in a dying state and the

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<sup>142</sup>De Burca, *The GAA: A History*, p.161.

<sup>143</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>144</sup>Neil Tranter, 'The Chronology of Organized Sport in Nineteenth-century Scotland: A Regional Study I- Patterns' in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1990), pp 188-203, p.200.

people generally have become apathetic.<sup>145</sup> This instability can be seen in the example of an initially prominent club, St Patrick's (Bundoran) which fell into decline in the 1920s due to a lack of public support and the withdrawal of players. Bundoran had won the county Gaelic football championship in 1920 but by 1923 the club was failing to attract sufficient support despite press appeals. In May 1923 it was announced in the press that 'new blood, it is expected, will appear, as nearly all the old stock has dropped away or is unavailable for the present.'<sup>146</sup> This did not materialise as hoped. At the club's AGM the same month, the chairman 'deplored the great decrease in the receipts compared with last year's, but regretted even more the want of interest in the promotion of Gaelic games in the town.'<sup>147</sup> The club lost their ground to the army the following month and in November were unable to field a team in the county Gaelic football championship.<sup>148</sup> This state of affairs had not greatly improved by the start of the following decade. In November 1930 it was stated that 'the securing of suitable football grounds has always been a difficulty in Bundoran, more especially from the point of view of securing a site which would draw a good 'gate'.<sup>149</sup> They became known as Star of the Sea having attained a park in a central location within the town.<sup>150</sup> Their revival was said to be due to the efforts of 'their esteemed president, H.J. O'Kelly and Mr E.Daly, clerk, Bundoran Urban Council.'<sup>151</sup> Both these men had been founder members of the club in 1919 and this illustrates the reliance on those with previous

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<sup>145</sup> *DD*, 28 March 1928.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 May 1923.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 and 25 May 1923. At a meeting held on 20 May, regret was expressed at the small attendance at a club meeting and hopes were expressed for increased support from local residents and business people.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 June and 16 Nov. 1923.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 Nov. 1930. See also *Ibid.*, 12 Feb. 1926. This followed a number of false dawns. They were said to be revived in 1926 but were too late to participate in the championship and were absent again in 1927. They returned again briefly in 1928 and 1929.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 and 22 Nov. 1930.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 Aug. 1922.



organisational experience and a significant standing in the town, and the work of individuals in establishing the GAA in Donegal.<sup>152</sup>

Both the Donegal town and Bundoran clubs returned to strength in the early 1930s with Bundoran victorious in the 1934 county championship final.<sup>153</sup> Local interest in Gaelic football in Donegal town was spread through the organisation of the Four Masters cup in November 1932 with Mountcharles, Killymard, Townawilly and Donegal town all involved.<sup>154</sup> Outside of the larger towns of Ballyshannon, Bundoran and Donegal, clubs were organised in villages such as Assaroe, Ballintra, Barnes, Cashelard, Croagh, Drimarone, Drumbar, Drumholm, Pettigo and Mountcharles at various stages between 1919 and 1934 but lacked the support and sustainability to challenge any of the more centralised clubs in South Donegal. A handful of nearby clubs from Counties Fermanagh and Leitrim also competed at various stages but interest levels also varied. By the end of 1933 the South Donegal District League was said to have 700 members and by 1934 there were ten clubs in the area and while not a massive increase from early 1920s figures, it did highlight a transition from soccer to Gaelic football in the majority of these villages and towns and a commitment to furthering the latter code which had not always been apparent prior to these decades.<sup>155</sup>

### **East Donegal**

An example of the inconsistent nature of GAA clubs in Donegal can be seen in the table for the eastern area, which is detailed in appendix 4. While the number of clubs in this division had dropped from a peak of fourteen in this decade in 1921 to seven in 1923, the exact reasons for this decline are unclear. By 1926 the number had risen to eleven but declined again towards the end of the decade. In 1934 there were twenty-five in the area, but this was by no means a

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<sup>152</sup>*DI*, 8 March 1919.

<sup>153</sup>*DP and DN*, 18 Aug. 1934.

<sup>154</sup>*Ibid.*, 19 Nov. 1932.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, Dec. 9 1933 and 17 March 1934.

steady growth. Some clubs undoubtedly were unhappy with treatment received by the county board. The Castlefin club which won the county championship in 1922 played no part, having failed to affiliate, in the next two years' competitions. A dispute with the county board over a failure to produce winners' medals and expenses for the semi-final and final appears to have been the cause of this.<sup>156</sup> This poor relationship continued after a club had been reorganised in the area. In April 1927 St Mary's voted unanimously for their withdrawal from the county board, their delegate listing a number of grievances against the Association that they felt had developed.<sup>157</sup> These included the turning down of a player for inter-county selection and frustration with treatment of their protests.<sup>158</sup>

The coming and going of Castlefin teams was not an exception by any means. There was no club in the eastern area which managed to appear every year in this decade. The infrequent nature of clubs and organisational difficulties experienced by their organisers can be seen in the fact that there were clubs in Ballybofey between 1920 and 1923, which then disappeared until 1925. The reformed 1925 club united with Stranorlar in 1928, which had its own clubs in 1920, 1921, 1922, 1925 and 1926. Clubs appeared in Carrigans in 1924, 1926 and 1927 while Carrigart had a club from 1923 until 1927.<sup>159</sup> Teams were also formed for local leagues such as the Ballybofey Summer League in 1928 and 1934.<sup>160</sup> In Letterkenny, the largest town in the area, clubs also appeared sporadically and under different names in the 1920s.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> *DJ*, 5 June 1925.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 April 1927.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>159</sup> Churchill had a team in 1924 only and Clonleigh had teams in 1924 and 1926. A team appeared in Downings in 1919 but did not survive and there were clubs in Milford and Lifford in 1923 and 1924. A club appeared as O'Toole's in Raphoe in 1921 and 1922 and other clubs were organised there in 1923, 1925, 1926, 1928 and 1929. Killygordon had clubs from 1919 until 1922 then did not reform until 1927. A team was present in Murlog in 1921 and 1922 but vanished after the collapse of the league to which it had affiliated.

<sup>160</sup> *DJ*, 22 June 1928 and 20 July 1934. This league consisted of Crossroads, Goland, Stranorlar Sarsfields, Castlefin, Trusk, Ballybofey Kickhams and Liscooley. It did not take place annually and on its revival in 1934 consisted of Finn Rovers, Main Street, Killygordon, Knock, Cloghan, Cross Roads and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street.

<sup>161</sup> See *Ibid.*, 13 July, 1923, 20 May 1925 and 20 July 1927.

## West Donegal

As shown in appendix 5, despite the existence of three teams in West Donegal in 1919, the number of clubs appearing annually in this area was low for much of the 1920s and after reaching a total of four in 1921-2, did not begin to increase or reach double figures until the early 1930s. The 1921 league clubs of Falcarragh, Gweedore, Derrybeg Emmets and Kincasslagh Rovers did not survive into 1923 and Maghery appears to have been the area's only representatives in the 1922-3 championship although a team was again organised in Kincasslagh in 1925. Development of GAA clubs in the north-west area was difficult. An attempt was made in July 1923 by two Cavan men, Seamus Gilheany and Gearóid McGovern, who were attending an Irish college in Gortahork, to organise clubs in Gortahork, Dunfanaghy and Creeslough on the instruction of the Ulster GAA Council in conjunction with the Central Council. Further east, clubs were also formed in Carrigart and Milford but little long term progress was made outside these villages.<sup>162</sup> Gilheany later stated that the procuring of grounds was a major problem as clubs did not own fields.<sup>163</sup> Counties Monaghan, Antrim and Cavan were also in need of reorganisation around this time and delegates had also been appointed for these areas.<sup>164</sup> Efforts were again made to reorganise Donegal in 1930 with Ulster Council secretary B.C. Fay suggesting the holding of public meetings and the appointment of 'an organiser for the county' but it was felt that Donegal could not afford to employ one due to a lack of finance.<sup>165</sup> These plans did not bring about any permanent existence of clubs in Donegal in areas where there had been none.

The West Donegal area was somewhat isolated from the revival of GAA activity in the east and south as meetings of the county board continued to be staged outside the western area

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<sup>162</sup> *DD*, 20 July 1923.

<sup>163</sup> *DP and DN*, 5 Jan. 1924.

<sup>164</sup> Ulster GAA Council Minutes, Vol. 1, Ulster Council Meeting, 28 April 1923.

<sup>165</sup> *DD*, 22 Feb. 1930.

up until 1934. Transport difficulties for those in the west continued to be a problem. As late as February 1934, in a statement in *The Irish Press*, K.J. Brennan, County Councillor, claimed that ‘the roads in the Upper and Lower Rosses were the worst in the county, incapable of bearing heavy traffic.’<sup>166</sup> This was despite efforts by the Lough Swilly Railway Company ‘to connect up the areas with a bus service from Gortahork via Dungloe, and through to Letterkenny.’ It was reported that after ‘a trial period of two months the roads became impassable for even horse and carts, and the company discontinued its service.’<sup>167</sup> While this was problematic for the development of industry in the area, efforts to organise GAA clubs also suffered. As will be seen later, the culture of soccer along the west coast also undoubtedly curtailed interest in Gaelic football in that area.

Seasonal migration to Scotland may have initially impacted on the development of clubs although it became a less significant feature as early as 1922 with the opportunities for workers decreasing as unemployment levels in Scotland began to rise. However by 1925, ‘there was a marked increase of emigration to America’ and this undoubtedly diminished the numbers of men available to play Gaelic football in the western area.<sup>168</sup> The problem of emigration was noted in the west division in May 1926 where only one club was competing in the county championship that year.<sup>169</sup> Emigration was a problem in many areas and seriously affected the number of players available in other areas such as Ardara, Glenties and Letterkenny although this problem was not unique to Donegal.<sup>170</sup> The *Gaelic Athlete* reported in 1926 that ‘the stream of emigrants still flows from all the most Gaelic centres of

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<sup>166</sup>*The Irish Press*, 23 Feb. 1934.

<sup>167</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>168</sup>Kelly Thompson, ‘Tattie hokers and the IRA: The Impact of Migration to Scotland on the IRA in Donegal during the War of Independence’ in Seán Beattie (ed.) *Donegal Annual*, 2009, no. 61 (Letterkenny, 2009), pp 52- 59, p.54.

<sup>169</sup>*DP and DN*, 8 May 1926.

<sup>170</sup>*DJ*, 24 Dec. 1926 and 20 July 1927.

Kerry.’<sup>171</sup> Between 1911 and 1926, 78,061 males emigrated from Donegal, while the 1930s in Ireland was also a period of ‘high emigration.’<sup>172</sup>

Along with Gweedore, a handful of junior clubs also became organised in the early 1930s and this undoubtedly boosted the spread of the game in the west.<sup>173</sup> Not all became affiliated and some had disbanded by the following year. Yet it reflects the increased interest in Gaelic football in villages where it may not have previously been played and, while junior competitions had been held regularly in the county since 1928, increased levels of formation of junior teams appears to have been a feature of the GAA in the county in the 1930s.<sup>174</sup> By 1934 there were fourteen clubs in west of the county and Gaelic football was beginning to gain a foothold along the west coast.

### **South-west**

An examination of appendix six highlights that organisation of clubs was a slow process in the south-west, as well as throughout the county. P.S. Mac a’ Ghoill identified one difficulty in the spread of the GAA in the early 1920s when he stated that on the occasion of the 1921 Ardara versus Glenties match, ‘most of the Ardara team had never played Gaelic before or even seen it played and it is also evident that the club did not even have a copy of “An Treorai Oifigiúil” (The Official Guide).’<sup>175</sup> Appeals, via letters, in October 1922 to ‘representatives of athletics,’ in the south-west, ‘asking them to establish GAA clubs’ were not met with any great success.<sup>176</sup> The slow process of developing clubs had not changed significantly by the beginning of 1927 with only five clubs noted in the area. An attempt to

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<sup>171</sup>*Gaelic Athlete* (Hereafter referred to as *GA*), 3 April 1926.

<sup>172</sup>*Thom’s Irish Almanac and Official Directory 1931* (Dublin, 1931) and De Burca, *The GAA: A History*, p. 163.

<sup>173</sup>These had been organised in Dunfanaghy, Annagry, Kincasslagh, Maramelin and Mullaghduff by the end of 1933 while senior clubs such as Dungloe and Gweedore also fielded reserve teams to strengthen competition there.

<sup>174</sup>*DJ*, 27 July 1928.

<sup>175</sup>P.S. Mac a’ Ghoill ‘So We Began’ in *CLG Ard a’ Ratha* (Ardara, 1980), pp 2-3, p.2.

<sup>176</sup>*DJ*, 27 Oct. 1922.

raise interest levels in Gaelic football was made by county board chairman Seán Ó Caiside that year with the offer of a silver cup for competition. Although teams were reformed in Killybegs and Kilcar that year, these had disbanded by the following year and there is no evidence the proposed cup competition went ahead.<sup>177</sup>

It was not until the 1930s that areas in the south-west such as Kilcar, Carrick, Glencolumbkille, Dunkineely and Killybegs began to play a more permanent role in the GAA as Gaelic football spread from larger villages to the more rural outlying town lands in a number of parishes. District and parish leagues were formed to help the spread of Gaelic football in a number of villages in the latter months of the year.<sup>178</sup> The organisation of a Gaelic football league for teams representing town lands in Kilcar and Glencolumbkille was said to be due to the efforts of the Reverend T.R. Griffith of Carrick in October of that year, a man who had previous experience of GAA administration in Ballyshannon.<sup>179</sup> It was he who donated the Slieve League cup for competition between six local areas.<sup>180</sup> By 1933 there were enough local teams for parish leagues in both Kilcar and Glencolumbkille.<sup>181</sup> A GAA club was revived in neighbouring area Killybegs in November 1930 with a practice match and it was reported that ‘for many of the players the match was their first introduction to Gaelic football.’<sup>182</sup> This revival had a knock-on effect in other nearby areas. The St Catherine’s Cup, donated by the Killybegs Niall Mór club, was organised at a meeting in Forde’s Hall, Bruckless, on 18 November 1931 and plans were drawn up for games between the teams representing the areas of Killybegs, Fintra, Dunkineely, Bruckless and Croagh with a ‘Central Council’ formed to administer affairs.<sup>183</sup> This increased activity eventually led to involvement at county championship level and by March 1933 there

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<sup>177</sup>Donegal GAA Archives. GAA /1/4/2/ (3 & 4) Letter from Seán Ó Caiside to Carrick and Killybegs unnamed men, 8 March 1927.

<sup>178</sup>Pat Conaghan, *Bygones: New Horizons on the History of Killybegs* (Killybegs, 1989), p.294.

<sup>179</sup>See *DD*, 25 Feb. 1928 and *DJ*, 31 Oct. 1930.

<sup>180</sup>*DJ*, 7 Nov. 1930.

<sup>181</sup>See *DD*, 23 Oct. 1933 and 21 Nov. 1933.

<sup>182</sup>*DJ*, 21 Nov. 1930.

<sup>183</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 Nov. 1931.

were seven clubs from the division involved. While not every one of the seventeen clubs noted in the area that year took part, it marked a shift in activity from the three core areas of Ardara, Glenties and Killybegs in the 1920s to more rural, outlying parishes.<sup>184</sup> By the end of 1934 this figure was the same and Gaelic football was becoming firmly established in the South-west division.

### **Inishowen**

As can be seen in appendix 7, there was only one team playing Gaelic football in Inishowen in 1919 and this was the Cahir O's club in Buncrana. Despite the existence of five teams in Inishowen in 1920, the number of GAA clubs in Inishowen remained low for much of the 1920s and into the following period. 1924 was the peak year for clubs with six in existence and the short existence of the Inishowen Gaelic football league explains this number of clubs. The spread of Gaelic football was difficult and reports indicate that these teams had no great tradition of Gaelic football. After St Mary's (Clonmany) defeat by Cahir O's in the opening league match, it was noted that this failure would 'be got rid of by experience and training, and until a team has both of these it cannot be expected to take everything by storm.'<sup>185</sup> A week later, both Cahir O's and Burt Hibernians 'played hard throughout, but there seemed to be a complete disregard for combination.'<sup>186</sup> By the beginning of February, Gaelic football was said to be progressing very favourably in the upper end of Inishowen' and hopes were expressed that the lower end would soon join in.<sup>187</sup> However, neither area made any great impact. Red Hugh's, Newtowncunningham, who began against Burt in March, were said to be 'a fine combination of youthful athletes who are ambitious for honours' but made little progress.<sup>188</sup> Other teams such as

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<sup>184</sup> *DJ*, 24 March 1933. Glencolumbkille, Kilcar and Kilaghtee entered the senior championship along with Ardara. Ardara were also represented in the junior competition along with Killaghtee and Owentocker.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 Jan. 1924.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 Jan. 1924.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 Feb. 1924.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 March 1924.

Burnfoot Kevin Barry's were criticised in the local press for their failure to affiliate and their involvement only in friendlies.<sup>189</sup> This was the only real attempt in this decade to organise a Gaelic football league in the area. Hopes expressed at a special meeting of the Inishowen District GAA committee in April 1925 that a Gaelic football league would be started 'immediately' amounted to nothing with little interest shown.<sup>190</sup> It must also be stated that a number of Inishowen GAA clubs placed more emphasis on hurling and the formation of Gaelic football teams attracted little interest. The poor relations between Inishowen delegates and the county board did nothing to remedy this situation. In the years from 1925 to 1928 there were no Gaelic football teams organised there and the development of soccer was clearly given more importance by a number of those with social influence in the area. Competition with soccer was a major problem. By 1934 there were at least thirty-two soccer teams in Inishowen, while only one Gaelic football team, Umricam from Buncrana, were recorded in the area that year.<sup>191</sup>

### **Hurling in Donegal, 1919-34**

There are a number of widely accepted reasons for the failure of hurling to develop in Donegal. Writing in 1993, Kevin Whelan outlined the areas located in what he called 'hurling's core region' and accounted for the reasons behind this. He noted that 'the hurling heartland is focused on the three counties of Cork, Tipperary and Kilkenny, with a supporting cast of adjacent counties including Limerick, Clare, Galway, Offaly, Laois, Waterford and Wexford.'<sup>192</sup> Whelan stated that these areas illustrated 'striking continuity with the earlier 'iomáin' region' and strong cultural boundaries allied with regional pride were also prominent factors in its development. The prominence of hurling in the south of the country was also connected with Norman influence in the late Medieval period, suitable terrain and a

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<sup>189</sup>*DJ*, 13 and 27 June 1924.

<sup>190</sup>*Ibid.*, 17 April 1925.

<sup>191</sup>See *DP and DN*, *DJ* and *DPP* 1934 for references to these teams.

<sup>192</sup>Kevin Whelan, 'The Geography of Hurling' Retrieved from [http://www.askaboutireland.ie/show\\_narrative\\_page.do?page\\_id=2352](http://www.askaboutireland.ie/show_narrative_page.do?page_id=2352) [accessed 13 Feb. 2008].



plentiful supply of ash for the manufacture of hurleys. ‘Popular Irish nationalist politics’ associated with the spread of the GAA also thrived in these areas of the country in the nineteenth century.<sup>193</sup> Hurling continued to be played in small pockets in counties Antrim and Down and in Inishowen after 1907. While camán was more frequently played in the 1905-7 period in Donegal, it was in the 1920s that the organisation of Gaelic football gained more significance and, as shown in the breakdown of clubs in appendix 8, hurling struggled to gain the previous recognition afforded it within the county. The number of teams and clubs playing hurling in the 1919-34 period peaked in 1925-6, reaching a figure of thirteen, but by 1934 this figure had dropped to ten and the sport’s development was a struggle.

Other more localised reasons can be said to have hindered the spread of hurling in the county in the 1920s. While nationally many counties have struggled to devote equal attention to both Gaelic football and hurling, in Donegal efforts to promote hurling varied after the re-founding of the county board. Although hopes were expressed at the initial county board meeting in April 1919 that hurling would prosper in Donegal, it was stated that ‘the board are not in a position this year to embark on any competitions’ and it was also hoped that clubs would be ready to field hurling teams the following year.<sup>194</sup> Already priority was being given to the organisation of Gaelic football and the arranging of these teams, delegates and leagues dominated initial county board meetings. In fact the board did not manage to organise a county championship final for hurling until November 1924 and Inishowen’s hurling clubs were excluded from this as they had not affiliated to the county board.<sup>195</sup>

Therefore hurling undoubtedly played second fiddle to Gaelic football in Donegal at the beginning of the 1920s. Throughout this decade and into the 1930s, the Donegal GAA county board continuously placed Gaelic football in a pre-eminent position, while the

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<sup>193</sup> Whelan, ‘The Geography of Hurling.’

<sup>194</sup> *DJ*, 11 April 1919.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Dec. 1924.

organisation and selection of the county hurling team seems to have had priority over activities at club level. In many areas where Gaelic football was beginning to replace soccer, such as in the south-west and south, there were no hurling clubs and the majority of the clubs in the 1905-7 west division were no longer in existence. Therefore it was harder to start anew and hurling teams were much harder to set up than those of Gaelic football, which was in many ways similar to soccer. As Tom Hunt has noted, hurling ‘was more difficult to organise and promote than football or cricket, as it required specialist equipment for each player.’ He has also stated that ‘it required that each player develop a great range of skills under the pressure of the attention of a direct opponent’ and also ‘the knowledge and experience of a practitioner of the game’ from an area where hurling thrived.<sup>196</sup>

While hurling in Donegal may have benefited from the input of the Garda Síochána from southern counties in the years after 1922, this was not sufficient to give the game the same structure and footing that Gaelic football was to experience. Certainly some outstanding hurlers came to the county, but this was not enough for a widespread organisation of clubs as many were involved only as players and, while selection was gained at inter-county level, club hurling did not have enough native players instructed, or interested, in a game which generally requires tutelage from a young age. An example of this can be seen in the fact that in 1928, there were said to be two Killybegs based Guards selected on the county hurling team, although the nearest hurling club team was in Ballyshannon.<sup>197</sup>

Given the lack of interest shown in hurling by the new county board in the initial years after its inception in 1919, clubs such as Carndonagh, Inch, Moville and Newtowncunningham attempted to remain involved with the GAA in Derry city, which was

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<sup>196</sup>Tom Hunt, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath* (Cork, 2007), pp 197-8.

<sup>197</sup>*DP and DN*, 13 Oct. 1928.

more conveniently located for them than some areas in County Donegal such as Letterkenny and Ballybofey where county board meetings were held. However this was not an entirely satisfactory arrangement as organisation in Derry was also problematic and interest levels varied.<sup>198</sup> By 1923, some Inishowen clubs were growing increasingly dissatisfied with the treatment by the Derry board with Carndonagh Cuchulainns complaining of the lack of home matches they were given and the inconsistency in the frequency of matches.<sup>199</sup> On 24 August 1923 the Inishowen GAA District League was formed at a convention organised by the Ulster Council secretary, B.C. Fay and held in St Mary's Hall, Buncrana.<sup>200</sup> The Inishowen hurling league got underway in September with the seven clubs of Inch Emeralds, Cahir O's, Carndonagh, Carrowmore, Burt Hibernians, Carrowkeel and Moville involved.<sup>201</sup> Despite the running of this league, this structure was allowed to disband and it is unclear if the 1924 hurling league was completed.<sup>202</sup> A league was also said to have begun in 1923 by the county board with three teams in the east affiliating but there is no evidence that this was finished.<sup>203</sup>

Relations between the Donegal GAA and Inishowen were discussed at a meeting of the Donegal county board in September 1923. Problems were evident and it was claimed that 'the Inishowen league were not in any way amenable to the Donegal county board.' The main concern expressed was the failure of the Inishowen clubs to pay affiliation fees to the Donegal board and it was decided that they would not be allowed to participate in the Donegal county championship until they defined their status. It was also announced that no players from Inishowen clubs would be selected for Donegal because of this.<sup>204</sup> At the final

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<sup>198</sup>See, for example, *DJ*, 10 Dec. 1920.

<sup>199</sup>*Ibid.*, 18 May 1923.

<sup>200</sup>*Ibid.*, 31 Aug. 1923.

<sup>201</sup>*Ibid.*, Exhibition matches in both Gaelic football and hurling were organised at Pollan Greens, Ballyliffin, 'to raise interest' on 23 September with special train services to be run, while Mr Fay agreed to present medals for the league winners.

<sup>202</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 Jan. 1924 and 4 April 1924. Burt Hibernians won the hurling title on 26 December 1923.

<sup>203</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 Sept. 1923. Lifford, Letterkenny and Raphoe were all said to be involved in this but there was little recorded of their progress.

<sup>204</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 Sept. 1923.

county board meeting of 1924 it was stated that Inishowen had still not paid their affiliation fees and as a consequence would have to remain outside the Donegal GAA.<sup>205</sup> While the Donegal county board remained in control of the organisation of hurling in the county, their efforts to organise clubs and competitions did not reflect their intentions stated at meetings. At the Annual County Convention in Mountcharles on 6 January 1925, a number of ways of promoting the game in the county were discussed. These included junior members of clubs being encouraged to take up the game and the writing to national schools to request assistance in promoting hurling.<sup>206</sup> A hurling league was organised for teams in the north-east in 1926 although it does not seem to have been completed.<sup>207</sup> In January 1927 the county board managed to secure a trophy for hurling purposes, which took on the title of its patrons, the *Derry People* cup. This came after much pressing by Ballyshannon delegates for a cup to be secured.<sup>208</sup> Only three teams, all from the Ballyshannon area, were included in the draw in 1927 but the following year, six teams had entered with Inishowen clubs Moville and Newtowncunningham becoming involved. Derry Gaels and Letterkenny joined these two teams in the northern section while in the south, Ballyshannon and Bundoran also entered.<sup>209</sup>

Outside Inishowen, interest in hurling amongst clubs was minimal. Some of these isolated clubs attempted to keep it alive with the help of external influences. A hurling club was revived in Ballyshannon in April 1923 after almost four years of inactivity and this club was to become the most important hurling club outside of the north of the county. It was reported at the meeting that ‘it was only among the juvenile section that interest in the game was retained. The coming of the guards to the town gave it the necessary impetus and it is

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<sup>205</sup>DD, 26 Dec. 1924.

<sup>206</sup>Ibid., 9 Jan. 1925.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., 13 Aug. 1926. Burt Hibernians, Newtowncunningham Red Hughs, Buncrana Military and Lifford were all named as participants.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., 15 Jan. 1927.

<sup>209</sup>Ibid., 26 March 1927 and 19 May 1928.

remarkable how popular it has become during the last few months.’<sup>210</sup> This club was almost exceptional outside Inishowen in that its members agreed to start a hurling club first that year and later a Gaelic football one as it was felt that starting both together ‘would result in a failure of each.’<sup>211</sup> This may have been one reason why the majority of Donegal clubs stuck to Gaelic football as the running of two teams involved in different codes may have been difficult from an organisational as well as financial point of view, with cross over of fixtures and players a hindrance given that Sunday was the only day for Gaelic games at this point and that most Gaelic football clubs in Donegal did not field hurling teams.

The efforts of an ‘energetic new committee and members of the present club-backed up by [a] dint of perseverance within-and by the generous financial support of the people of the town’ were noted as factors in the Ballyshannon club’s county final win in 1924.<sup>212</sup> This passion for hurling, allied with strong financial backing, was clearly lacking in the majority of other GAA clubs in Donegal at this time. The Ballyshannon club set up their parish league in April 1925 and were also instrumental in the organisation of the South-western league on 1 October 1925 at a meeting in the local Mall.<sup>213</sup> It seems however that this lasted only one season but this illustrates the club’s eagerness to take the initiative and organise competitive matches almost independently of the county board. They continued into the 1930s despite a lack of competition, with the decline of the South-western hurling league, which must have made it difficult for their players to stay motivated.

Things did not improve until the county board decided to organise a separate committee for hurling at the Annual Convention in January 1933 after a proposal by Guard

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<sup>210</sup> *DD*, 27 April 1923.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>212</sup> *DV*, 15 March, 10, 17 May and 7 June 1924, *DD*, 5 Dec. 1924.

<sup>213</sup> *DV*, 4 April 1925 and *DD*, 2 Oct. 1925.

Michael Walsh who had been heavily involved in the Letterkenny hurling club.<sup>214</sup> This was followed by a meeting held in on 30 April 1933 in Carndonagh with national school teacher Michael Doherty presiding. A number of problems which had hampered the development of hurling in the county were outlined. Doherty felt that ‘it had fallen through for want of trophies and of proper consideration by the governing committee.’<sup>215</sup> A temporary committee was formed with Doherty appointed chairman and Walsh taking up the role of honorary secretary.<sup>216</sup> The location of participating clubs and venues for the hosting of meetings were generally centred in Inishowen and this reflects where interest was greatest in the game. At a meeting held in Buncrana on 14 May 1933 it was stated that four Inishowen clubs, Culdaff, Carndonagh, Buncrana, Burt, eastern club Letterkenny and Ballyshannon in the south had entered for the county championship. A league was to be run in the northern area for the Cardinal O’Donnell cup. Subscriptions were invited to alleviate funds and home clubs were deemed responsible for arranging meals for the visitors at matches. They were also asked to do their own advertising and away teams requested to pay their own travelling expenses.<sup>217</sup> There was a strong involvement of national school teachers with three involved while the movement also received the backing of Brother Albinus of St Eunan’s College and Superintendent Burke. Significantly it was announced that the county board had given them permission to carry on alone, independent of their administration.

By the end of 1933 the state of hurling in Donegal had improved significantly with an increase in the number of affiliated clubs, competitions and matches that year. At the first annual convention of the Donegal hurling board on 16 December 1933 in Derry, secretary,

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<sup>214</sup> *DD*, 4 Feb. 1933.

<sup>215</sup> *DJ*, 5 May 1933. Guard Walsh was particularly scathing of the lack of effort shown by the county board and claimed that they were in operation only to promote Gaelic football. He felt that his club St Eunans had ‘done all it could to further hurling but it found the county board lacking.’

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 May 1933.

Michael Walsh was able to report on ‘a very successful season.’<sup>218</sup> He stated that seven senior teams had affiliated, with another Inishowen club, Inch Emeralds, joining the above teams. Six of these clubs were involved in the county championship and Cardinal O’Donnell cup competition. It was also noted that fifty-eight matches had been played since 28 May with the fifty-ninth scheduled for the following Sunday. Games were said to be of a high standard and a juvenile competition, involving clubs from Letterkenny, Burt and Carndonagh was played in conjunction with the championship. A competition for under sixteens had also been played with Buncrana, Burt, Letterkenny and Carndonagh all took part and the Toal cup for this was donated by the Ballyshannon club. The financial state of the club was said to be ‘very good’ and officers were re-elected and the good work of a number of officials praised.<sup>219</sup>

Progress was slow but steady in 1934. Eight clubs affiliated that year and a junior championship had also been run along with the senior championship and a number of underage competitions were organised and financially, the board was in a healthy state. Unsurprisingly, there were some problems with the number of matches not being as high with a single league system replacing the double league matches in operation the previous year. It was also noted by the chairman at the annual Convention that ‘gate receipts at club and trial matches were very small’ and punctuality could have been better.<sup>220</sup> He also felt that the Ulster Council could have given more support to promote the game, particularly in the GAA’s Golden Jubilee year. This overall failure to develop weak hurling areas in the county continued to prevail, despite attempts by some clubs isolated from the heart of hurling in Inishowen.

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<sup>218</sup> *DD*, 23 Dec. 1934.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>220</sup> *DJ*, 10 Dec. 1934. Inishowen teams Burt, Inch, St Mary’s (Buncrana), Carndonagh Cuchulainns, St Comgall’s of Carrowmore and Moville all took part along with St Eunan’s of Letterkenny and Donegal town.

It was an uphill battle to try to get hurling organised in areas such as the south-west. This was despite some exhibitions hosted by the Ardara GAA club at their annual sports in 1926 and 1931.<sup>221</sup> In a review of attempts to organise the sport in Ardara and Glencolumbkille at the divisional meeting of the South-west committee in January 1934, it was stated that hurling was being ‘sadly neglected in this division.’<sup>222</sup> This was said to be due to the fact that little help was given by the county board and that the area was too far away from the county’s most fertile hurling region, Inishowen. Other reasons were also offered:

The greatest obstacle was finance, and only a few adults in each place purchased camáns. These were too old ever to become adept at the game, so not being satisfied with the progress they were making, they developed the inferiority complex mentally and gave it up.<sup>223</sup>

The writer hoped to see the game organised amongst youths as he felt that ‘the only hope for the revival of hurling lies with the schoolboys.’<sup>224</sup> Hopes expressed at the Ulster GAA Convention in March 1926 that county boards would use their influence to procure suitable grounds for the promotion of hurling in schools were not fulfilled in Donegal.<sup>225</sup> It was in Inishowen that the game continued to survive, whereas most GAA clubs in the county were content to focus primarily on Gaelic football, with a small number of hurling teams and clubs located in larger urban centres such as Letterkenny and Ballyshannon.

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<sup>221</sup>*DD*, 21 Aug. 1926 and *DV*, 22 Aug. 1931.

<sup>222</sup>*DP and DN*, 20 Jan. 1934.

<sup>223</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>224</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>225</sup>Ulster GAA Council Minutes, Vol. 1, Annual Convention, 13 March 1926.



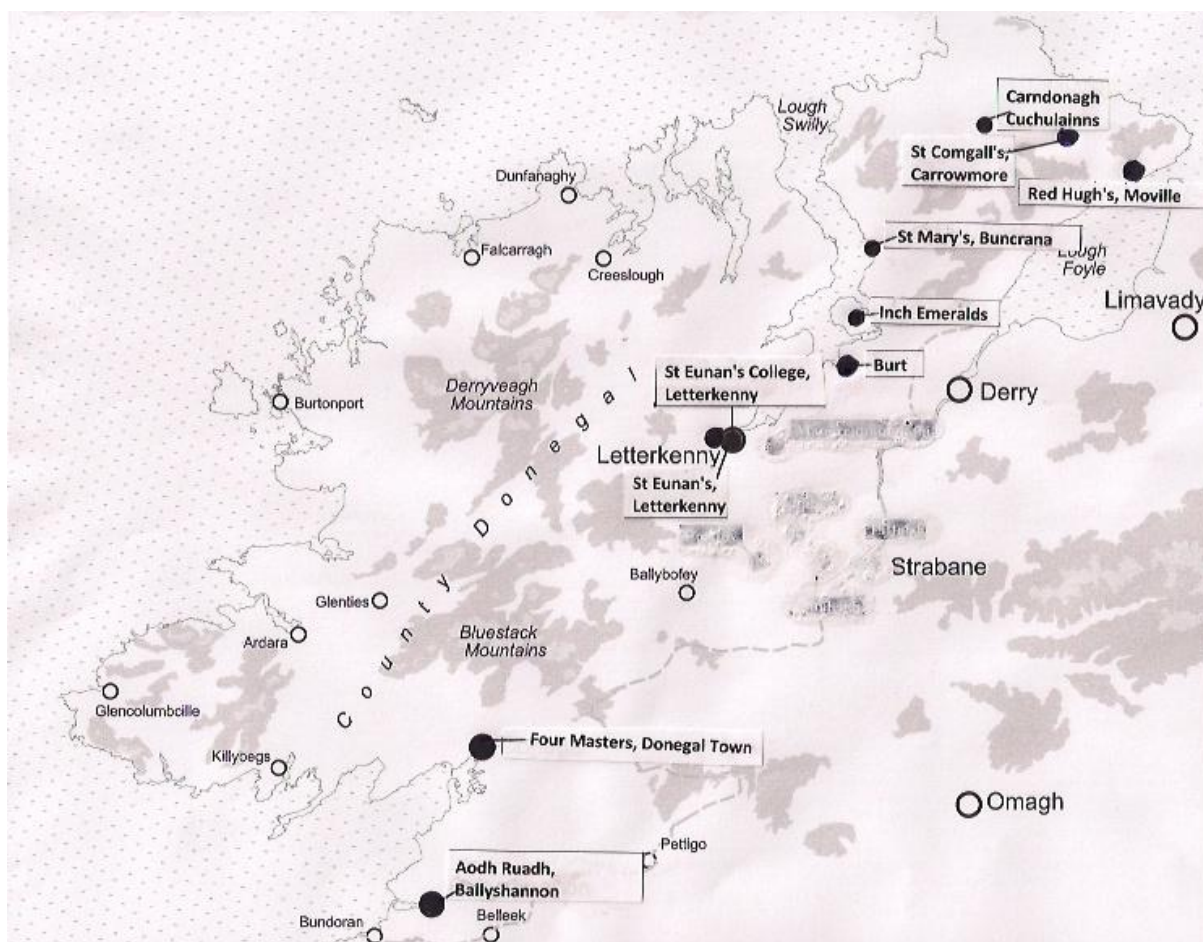


Figure 4.6: Hurling teams in Donegal, 1934. Source: *DD, DV, DJ, DP and TN, DPP* 1934.

### Popularising Gaelic football in Donegal

Along with club matches and inter-county competitions, interest in Gaelic football in the 1920s was spread by the organisation of ‘GAA Sports’ throughout the county and the hosting of matches at Athletic sports under GAA rules, all of which helped boost levels of finance. As mentioned, Gaelic football had been played at tournaments in Donegal town in August 1918 and March 1919 while Ballyshannon hosted a Gaelic football tournament in September 1918.<sup>226</sup> It was also played at the Mountcharles Gaelic Sports in July 1920 and at the Donegal town Aeridheacht in August of that year.<sup>227</sup> The first annual Tír Conaill GAA Sports were held at the Mental Hospital grounds in Letterkenny on 28 August 1921 and drew

<sup>226</sup> *DP and DN*, 31 Aug. 1918 and 22 March 1919 and *DI*, 5 Oct. 1918.

<sup>227</sup> *DP and DN*, 31 July and 28 Aug. 1920.

a gate of 'over £70.'<sup>228</sup> The high point of the day's events was a match between Derry and an East Donegal selection. These sports generally included athletics and novelty races and excluded 'foreign' games. This seems to indicate an increase in involvement of GAA officials in local sports and these men were eager to make sure their interests were served. Organisation for a number of events was helped by the dedication of Donegal county board secretary John Curran who travelled regularly from Letterkenny to act as official handicapper throughout the county in the early years of the new county board, although not every area visited adopted Gaelic games. He appeared at sports in Lifford and Rathmullan in 1923 and Glenties the following year.<sup>229</sup> This meant that through his encouragement, Gaelic football could be demonstrated at these parish events.<sup>230</sup>

Other events such as athletics and a 'place football kick' were also held at the County GAA Sports, held under NACA rules in 1922 with 'valuable prizes' for each event and an 'exhibition match' between Derry and Donegal selections.<sup>231</sup> The GAA, in hosting athletics along with Gaelic football as part of a day's entertainment and, through the organisation of a Gaelic football county championship, offered a variety of competitions at the beginning of the 1920s and this differed greatly from the way in which association football, which had no widespread league or cup, was organised. While progress continued to be slow, a number of administrative decisions improved matters. The areas covering Gaelic football leagues did not always remain constant and divisions were forced to amalgamate on a number of occasions in this decade. With the low level of clubs in the south and south-west, the decision was taken to combine these divisions for the 1923-4 season as only six clubs from Ardara, Killybegs,

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<sup>228</sup>*DP and DN*, 31 Aug. 1921.

<sup>229</sup>*DJ*, 8 Aug. and 12 Sept. 1923 and 20 Aug. 1924.

<sup>230</sup>*DD*, 20 Feb. 1920.

<sup>231</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 July 1922. The National Athletics and Cycling Association took over the responsibility from the GAA of organising athletics that year. See Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People's History*, p. 50.

Glenties, Bundoran, Ballyshannon and Donegal town had affiliated in these areas.<sup>232</sup> A number of rules were put in place in November 1924 to help ease organisational difficulties. These included the collection of five shillings from every home club and publication of lists of registered players. Of more importance was a new rule which meant that teams not on the field within ten minutes of the appointed time would lose the points.<sup>233</sup> In addition to the county championship, which was, apart from 1927, played on a divisional league basis with a knock-out system coming into play at the semi-final stage, the organisation of secondary cup competitions boosted the number of matches available and prolonged the GAA season.<sup>234</sup> In November 1925 the Dr McGinley Cup was introduced for clubs in the east of the county while in 1926 the organisation of the *Democrat* cup provided competition for all affiliated clubs.<sup>235</sup> The latter was played on a knock out basis with divisional winners meeting in the county final. A competition for junior teams was re-introduced in 1928 while the St Vincent De Paul Charity cup also got underway for senior teams that year.<sup>236</sup> This organisation of competitions, generally initially on a divisional basis with each winners meeting in the latter stages, was beneficial as clearly travelling expenses had to be carefully monitored.

The decision to adhere to district leagues could be said to be one of the major successes of the GAA in Donegal in the 1920s, as, despite the problems which existed, competitions were guaranteed annually. Knowledge of skills and tactics was also spread in the local press through the publishing of chapters from Dick Fitzgerald's *How to Play Gaelic Football* on a weekly basis in 1933.<sup>237</sup> The inclusion in the local press of the county board bye-laws also undoubtedly helped clarify matters at the same time.<sup>238</sup> At inter-county level,

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<sup>232</sup>*DJ*, 7 Sept. 1923.

<sup>233</sup>*DD*, 7 Nov. 1924.

<sup>234</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 Feb. 1928. This all-county league was deemed a failure with a number of teams withdrawing before Christmas.

<sup>235</sup>*DJ*, 27 Nov. 1925 and *DD*, 29 May 1926.

<sup>236</sup>*DJ*, 27 July and 9 Nov. 1928.

<sup>237</sup> See, for example, *DP and TN*, 13 May, 1933.

<sup>238</sup>*Ibid.*,

the decision for Donegal to play in the junior Gaelic football championship in 1930 would later give a boost to the GAA in the county as until then, they had little success in the Ulster Gaelic football championship and this enabled them to compete at a level more suited to their players' abilities and resources.<sup>239</sup> Although they returned to the senior championship in 1931 and 1932, in 1933 it was again decided to participate at junior level. Match organisation and problems getting players together and to venues on time had plagued the county set up for most of the 1920s with little success achieved on the playing field.<sup>240</sup> The long journey to Clones in Monaghan was blamed for Donegal's McKenna Cup semi-final defeat in 1928 with claims that 'some of the Donegal players had to travel a distance of over 140 miles, and were on the road at 4am on Sunday morning.'<sup>241</sup> The lack of a tradition of Gaelic football was also said to be a problem.<sup>242</sup>

Nationally, administration of GAA affairs improved under the secretaryship of Pádraig O'Caoimh, who was appointed to this role in 1929.<sup>243</sup> Organisation of Gaelic games in Donegal undoubtedly improved in the early 1930s. The minor Gaelic football championship was inaugurated in the spring of 1931.<sup>244</sup> An insurance scheme for players became available in Donegal in October and by 1934, the financial situation of the county board had improved.<sup>245</sup> This was a result of improved administration. At the 1933 Annual Convention held in January in Killybegs, it was decided to have four district committees organised, working subordinately to the county board and by the beginning of the following year a marked improvement was noticeable.<sup>246</sup> This was said to be due to better management

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<sup>239</sup>DD, 15 March 1930.

<sup>240</sup>See for example, Ulster GAA Council Minutes, Vol. 1, Meeting of Council, 1 July 1922.

<sup>241</sup>DD, 7 April 1928.

<sup>242</sup>Ibid., 2 April 1926.

<sup>243</sup>De Burca, *The GAA: A History*, p.145.

<sup>244</sup>DP and DN, 28 Feb. 1931.

<sup>245</sup>DD, 10 Oct. 1931.

<sup>246</sup>Ibid., 13 Jan. 1934.

of affairs at divisional level. It was noted that the number of affiliated clubs had risen from sixteen in 1932 to twenty-nine in 1933.<sup>247</sup>

Donegal's extended run in the 1933 All Ireland junior championship undoubtedly raised enthusiasm for Gaelic football and this was noted in the Tantallon (Mountcharles) notes in the *Donegal Democrat* after the county's victory over Cork in the semi-final in September. The result, it was claimed, had 'added a zest to the game' between Croagh and Tanatallon and it was reported that 'on learning of Donegal's victory in Croke Park, great joy and enthusiasm was expressed by all in the town and district...the news being eagerly awaited at the houses where wireless sets were installed.'<sup>248</sup> This appearance in the 1933 All-Ireland junior final was also the result of improvements in organisation. They had won only one Ulster championship match in the 1920s but the following decade saw an improvement in organisation at inter-county level with the procuring of a trainer, the provision of adequate training facilities and accomodation and meals for players being arranged in 1933.<sup>249</sup> This was reflected in the build up to the All-Ireland junior Gaelic football final against Mayo. Players' fitness levels were carefully monitored and an examination of the letters of county board chairman Seán Ó Caiside illustrate the lengths he went to in order to secure success and improve the status of Gaelic football in the county.<sup>250</sup> Preparation was improving vastly with Ó Caiside giving advice, via letters, to each team member on their Cork opponents and proper lifestyle choices in the build up to the semi-final.<sup>251</sup> The hosting of intra-divisional matches with a view to selection for the county team was said to have been beneficial to the standard of play.<sup>252</sup> While Ó Caiside's relationship with a number of eastern board delegates, many of whom felt they were not getting fair treatment in the selection

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<sup>247</sup>*DD*, 13 Jan. 1934.

<sup>248</sup>*Ibid.*, 9 Sept. 1933.

<sup>249</sup>See An t-Ath Seán ÓGallchóir, *The Raidio na Gaeltachta Book of Donegal GAA Facts*, pp 24-5 and Donegal GAA Archives. GAA /1/4/1 (7) (1-16) and GAA /1/4/1 (8) (1-16)

<sup>250</sup>Donegal GAA Archives, Letter from Seán Collins to Seán Ó Caiside, 31 Aug. 1933 GAA/1/4/1 (6) (28)

<sup>251</sup>Donegal GAA Archives, Undated letter from Seán Ó Caiside to each member of Donegal team before the All-Ireland junior Gaelic football semi-final, 1933. GAA/1/4/1 (11) (1)

<sup>252</sup>*DD*, 13 Jan. 1934.

of their players for the county team, was poor, he can be seen as the man who carried the Donegal GAA through the difficult period of the 1920s and his passion for Gaelic football is evident in his writing.<sup>253</sup>

Giving up Sundays, for many the only day of the week off work, in order to help with organisation of GAA matches and generally being unpaid for it except for limited travel expenses required dedication. The Dungloe club, for example, benefited from a number of dedicated organisers who kept the club going in these years and, like Aodh Ruadh, were eager to find opposition outside their own area if necessary. One of these dedicated Dungloe officials was John Tuohy, a bank official said to be ‘the life of the GAA movement there’ before his departure in March 1925 while Packy Gallagher, a man who ‘spent his time and cash freely for the welfare of the GAA’ was also heavily involved in improving the GAA in this area.<sup>254</sup> One Ballybofey county board delegate expressed his own dedication in a letter to Seán Ó Caiside in July 1933:

I’ll try and lend a hand at Dungloe on Sunday myself but when a wife and four weans\* want to go to Bundoran it is not easy breaking down the opposition. It is a long time since I had a Sunday to myself now but what matter, if we can get the games of the Gael on a proper footing.<sup>255</sup>

It is also evident that in many areas, organisation was undertaken by a small number of men and help was difficult to attain. In January 1930 Ó Caiside complained that there were not enough newcomers in the GAA and that they were relying on ‘old friends.’<sup>256</sup> F.J. Murphy illustrated that this was still the case in Ballybofey three years later when he stated that support ‘for GAA matches is not big and the same few are saddled with all the work.’<sup>257</sup> The decision to become involved reflected a belief prevalent amongst many GAA members

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<sup>253</sup>Donegal GAA Archives, Letter from Seán Ó Caiside to Brother Lucien, 13 Nov. 1933. GAA /1/4/1/ (9) (6)

<sup>254</sup>See *DJ*, 6 March 1925 and GAA Archives, Letter from A. Delap to Seán Ó Caiside, 4 Jan 1934. GAA/1/4/1 (12) (1)

<sup>255</sup>Donegal GAA Archives, Letter from F.J. Murphy to Seán Ó Caiside, 7 July 1933. GAA 1/4/1/(5) (2)\* ‘weans’ is a Scottish, North-east England and Donegal word for children.

<sup>256</sup>*DD*, 11 Jan. 1930.

<sup>257</sup>Donegal GAA Archives, Letter from F.J. Murphy to Seán Ó Caiside, 31 Aug. 1933. GAA 1/4/1/ (6) (31)

that there was a higher nationalist purpose involved rather than simply sport for recreational purposes. It was largely due to this dedication that the GAA was firmly established in Donegal by 1934.

### **Conclusion**

In 1934 the GAA celebrated its Golden Jubilee and the organisation's official historian, Marcus De Burca, has stated that by the end of these first fifty years 'it had manifestly achieved its twin objectives of 1884 of reviving the traditional field games of Ireland and erecting a barrier to the tide of Anglicisation periodically threatening to engulf the island.'<sup>258</sup> While this may have been the case elsewhere, in Donegal, and generally throughout Ulster, the development of Gaelic games had been a slow, tough struggle. This chapter has shown the importance of individuals in organising the GAA in Donegal. The organisation of competitive structures in the 1919-34 period was crucial to the spread and success of Gaelic football. However, this was dependent on a small group of enthusiasts who were dedicated to making it the number one team game in the county. When this enthusiasm was absent locally, or, in the case of hurling, restricted to a handful of areas, the dissemination of these sports undoubtedly suffered. The loss of key administrators had a critical effect on the first county board in 1907. A continuous absence of those with the energy, enthusiasm and social standing to arrange GAA competitions in the years after this until 1919 was also highly significant.

The power of agency in the spread of sports is apparent as without the external influence of provincial and national organisers, the spread of Gaelic games was a mundane, sometimes laboured, development. The rate at which this occurred in Donegal illustrates how the GAA there struggled to gain popular support and the survival of clubs was characterised

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<sup>258</sup>De Burca, *The GAA: A History*, p.151.

by inconsistency. It has also been shown that political involvement within the organisation was sporadic and the success of the GAA in the county was not dependent on this. As Peter Hart has stated, there is only limited evidence to suggest ‘a strong link’ between GAA members and IRA activity.<sup>259</sup> This was generally the case in Donegal and, as seen in the struggle for Ireland’s independence, Donegal remained on the periphery of more regionally concentrated military events.

Despite organisational difficulties, the development of annual competitive structures provided young men with team sports whereas by 1919, participation in soccer was limited to friendly games and this was not enough to maintain interest. As will be seen, the GAA benefited from a lack of direct competition from soccer until 1925 and its superior administrative structure meant that Gaelic football was, in some areas, the only code available. This was a feature of the south and south-west where GAA clubs became the focal point of a number of parishes and provided young men with a recreational and social outlet. GAA organisers showed an astute awareness of this and in initially arranging Gaelic football at local sports were able to demonstrate how the game should be played. The provision of regular county board meetings, in larger, urban areas where club delegates could discuss matters and build social networks was also crucial. Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have noted that ‘throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, the GAA steadily expanded.’<sup>260</sup> This expansion did not become particularly noticeable at club level in Donegal until the 1930s and again highlights the slow evolution of sport within Donegal society. Improvements in administration at national level in the early 1930s were reflected there, and an improved knowledge of Gaelic football and organisational strategies saw the county compete at All-Ireland level for the first time. The challenge provided by association football, and its bearing on the geographical spread of Gaelic football, will be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>259</sup> Hart, ‘The Geography of Revolution in Ireland’, p.169.

<sup>260</sup> Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People’s History*, p.50.



## **Chapter 5: The Conflict between the GAA and Association football in Donegal, 1905-1934**

### **Introduction**

The playing of association football can be said to have seriously hindered the development of the GAA in Donegal at various stages in the period from 1884 to 1934. This was largely due to the popularity of soccer in many areas in the county and the fact that, apart from the ball handling and point scoring rules, Gaelic football and association football were in some ways similar which meant that players who were good at soccer could adapt to the other code relatively easily, with ball distribution using the feet prominent in both. The origins of soccer in the county have been looked at in chapter two and it is sufficient to say that it was this sport which was first organised and this meant that teams and clubs were already in operation in many areas before a widespread attempt was made to promote Gaelic games. A change in codes was therefore likely to be difficult without sufficient reason to do so. There is no evidence that any of the initial Donegal GAA clubs came into conflict with soccer teams in the period from 1888 until 1892 but soccer grew in popularity in Donegal in the 1890s and this did little to help the already fragile development of the GAA. Section I will show that cup competitions were fundamental to the development of soccer in the county from 1925 onwards. Cultural links with Derry and Scotland and a strong tradition of soccer in the north-east and Inishowen were also highly significant factors in the strengthening of soccer in that area. As will be seen, initially, the transferral of players and personnel from soccer aided the development of the GAA in the south and south-west as a number of those with soccer experience became key administrators in the Donegal GAA county board. The GAA was also helped by its parish identity which many soccer clubs, particularly in the south of the county, struggled to obtain. Added to this, Donegal, with its isolated areas and

mountainous divide, did not work as a county in regard to being united in the organisation of sport and it was soccer which suffered the most from this.

By the middle of the 1930s there were clear boundaries between Gaelic football and association football strongholds and an obvious shift had taken place, although in some villages and towns both sports continued to be played. It was in the south and south-west where Gaelic football was largely unchallenged. Although each code was attracting interest in the west, north-west and east of the county, the Inishowen peninsula was generally a soccer zone, although it was also in this area where the strength of hurling lay. Soccer also attracted large support in a concentrated area west of Lough Swilly, and in eastern areas such as Ballybofey, Letterkenny and Lifford where the GAA struggled to compete with association football clubs. The areas where Gaelic games and soccer in Donegal were strongest will therefore be contrasted through an analysis of the level of activity of clubs representative of these sports, their competitions and in the support shown at a number of matches. The socio-occupational background of Donegal's soccer players and organisers will also be analysed and an assessment of comparative trends in Belfast and Westmeath will be offered. As will be shown, it was those in the industrial category who made up the majority of Donegal's soccer players and organisers.

Section II covers attempts by the GAA to counteract the playing of soccer. The failure of the Ban and also the GAA's attempt to brand soccer as a 'foreign' game is of key significance to this chapter and the complexities of making straightforward links between nationalist ideology and sporting preferences will also be shown. The ways and means used to propagate the playing of Gaelic games in some sections of the Donegal press and discussed at meetings of the Donegal county board, and their levels of success, will be assessed in this chapter. The methods employed by those involved in the promotion of the GAA, in their criticism of soccer, and the tactics used to prevent interest and participation in the latter sport

will also be discussed. It is clear that those responsible for this frequently felt it necessary to attack soccer officials and players in the county. Similarly the response and views of those involved in the organisation of soccer will be assessed.

### **I: The development of soccer in Donegal in the early twentieth century**

The main stronghold of soccer in Ireland in the early 1900s seems to have been County Antrim, particularly in regard to the number of clubs affiliated to the Irish Football Association which had its headquarters in Belfast. By October 1906 there were six district areas in operation, with the County Antrim FA having seventy-one clubs. There were sixty clubs affiliated in Leinster, while only ten were affiliated from Munster. The North-west FA, based in Derry city, had twenty-four clubs, while the Mid-Ulster area had forty-six clubs and the Fermanagh and Western District had only six.<sup>1</sup> There were at least nineteen soccer teams in Donegal in 1906 but it is unclear if any Donegal clubs took part in the IFA junior Cup that year and a lack of interest in joining the country's governing body was apparent rather than any major absence of clubs at this time.<sup>2</sup>

An analysis of soccer clubs in Donegal in the period from 1905 until 1934 as shown in appendices 9 to 11, illustrates the diversity and changes in the popularity of soccer, through the organisation of teams, leagues and cup competitions across the county.<sup>3</sup> It also highlights the areas where the organisation of association football had almost completely fallen apart by the mid-1930s. As will be seen, it was in the east and north-east and Inishowen where the vast majority of soccer clubs were located by the 1930s, illustrating the game's popularity over Gaelic football in these areas. In particular, while there were only

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<sup>1</sup>Irish Football Association Minute Book 1903-1909, Council Meeting, Belfast, 9 Oct. 1906.D/4196/A/2. p. 165.

<sup>2</sup>See appendix 9.

<sup>3</sup>Tables have been compiled using information found in the *DJ*, *DD*, *DV*, *DI*, *DP* and *DN*, *DP* and *TN* and *DPP* newspapers.

fourteen clubs recorded in the east/north-east in 1905, by 1934 there were sixty-six in these areas. Inishowen had also seen a growth from three in 1905 to thirty-two in 1934. By this time, the number of clubs in the south and south-west had failed to show any major growth. The number of South Donegal clubs reached a peak of seven in 1916 but by 1934 this was reduced to just two. Figures for the South-west were also poor and the 1905 figure of two had been halved by 1934. Soccer was almost totally wiped out in these two areas by 1934 despite the perseverance of clubs in Ballyshannon and Killybegs.

As illustrated in appendix 9, club figures in the 1905 to 1914 period showed no massive growth. The 1905 overall total of thirty-two was actually the highest in these years, with a widespread lack of activity in 1908 where no clubs were reported in three areas. By 1914 the numbers reported had dropped to eighteen. The majority of clubs were inconsistent in their nature and did not appear each year but efforts to organise soccer on a yearly basis were evident in Ballyshannon where Erne FC was organised annually, while teams in Milford, Killybegs and Donegal town made strong efforts to persist throughout this period. This ‘chronic instability’ was also common in East Northumberland in the 1882 to 1914 period and Metcalfe believes that ‘money was a necessary condition for the long term viability of any club.’<sup>4</sup>

What is most striking about the period from 1915 until 1924 is the absence of clubs in the south and south-west, particularly after 1918, as detailed in appendix 10. This coincided with a decline in cup competitions for these areas after 1915 and a rise in nationalism towards the end of the decade. Organisation of soccer clubs was poor for the first half of the 1920s in the majority of areas although East and North-east Donegal were exceptions in this regard. It is clear that by 1924 the development of soccer in the county was a struggle and the early

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<sup>4</sup>Alan Metcalfe, ‘Football in the Mining Communities of East Northumberland 1882-1914’ in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 5, no. 3 (1988) pp 269-91, p.278.

promise shown by the County Donegal FA in the 1890s had not borne fruit with organised competitions in Gaelic games proving more attractive to many at this point.

Figures for South-west Donegal clubs in the 1925 to 1934 period, as illustrated in appendix 11, illustrate a continual lack of interest in forming association football clubs and it is clear that GAA organisers had a firm grip on sporting activity in this area. The GAA remained dominant in this region with only one soccer club in operation in 1934. West Donegal, with a strong tradition of soccer in many areas, fared somewhat better and interest in soccer remained constant after 1925. It was in the east/north-east region where the strength of soccer was apparent and this increase at the beginning of the decade was undoubtedly boosted by the organisation of competitive soccer in the area. A growth was also experienced in Inishowen at this time with thirty-six clubs present in 1933 and this was a growth of twenty-five from the 1925 figure. The playing of soccer in the South and South-west, while already in decline, was undoubtedly weakened by the transferral of players to Gaelic football in the 1920s.

As noted in the introduction, the theory that the War of Independence polarised public opinion against soccer has been mentioned in a number of club histories. While it may have influenced some areas, there was no widespread transfer of clubs from soccer to Gaelic football. As shown in the previous chapter, the number of Gaelic football clubs did rise from eighteen in 1919 to a peak (in the 1920s) of thirty by 1924 but examples of a direct transformation from soccer to Gaelic football clubs are not so common, particularly outside the south and south-west. Both the Ardara and Glenties association soccer clubs may well have been in decline prior to this. Newspaper reports indicate the presence of a soccer club in Ardara until at least December 1916 but it is difficult to establish, given a lack of subsequent coverage in the press, how much activity this club was involved in during the period from 1917 to 1921. Therefore the soccer club in the parish may have already been in decline

before the War of Independence.<sup>5</sup> Ardara Emeralds' last competitive action was the 1915 Britton Cup and this lack of regular competition may also have influenced the decision to get involved in Gaelic football.<sup>6</sup> By May 1917, Ardara soccer players were appearing for Dunkineely Pioneers and this indicates a decline in local soccer activity.<sup>7</sup> Unlike Killybegs Emeralds, a lack of success in other soccer competitions and the absence of a railway station may also have been detrimental to the club's development. Glenties' last soccer appearance also appears to have been much earlier than 1921, coming in a defeat against Donegal Celtic in 1917.<sup>8</sup>

Nationalism, local enthusiasm, personal preferences and the boredom of non-competitive soccer matches were all factors in the transferral from soccer to GAA in Donegal. Transferral of key organisers did lead to a decline in soccer in some areas and may be a more satisfactory explanation than the anti-British theory. Switching of codes in sport was relatively common in Britain and France and this transferral of players has been well documented.<sup>9</sup> Cross-over of players and administrators was significant in the organisation of the GAA in Donegal in the 1920s as a number of those with experience of soccer later became involved as officials at GAA county board level. In Ardara, former soccer player and national school teacher Seán Ó Caiside was able to use his organisational and playing experience to ensure that Gaelic football became the most popular sport there, and indeed in the south and south-west of the county through his involvement at county board level.

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<sup>5</sup>See P.S. Mac a' Ghoill, 'So We Began' in *CLG Ardara 'Ratha* (Ardara, 1980), p.2 and *DP and DN*, 9 Dec. 1916 for the last newspaper reference to Ardara Emeralds. Mac a' Ghoill has suggested that this decline in soccer in Ardara was in place as early as 1910 but this is at odds with newspaper reports.

<sup>6</sup>*DJ*, 26 Feb. 1915. Ardara Emeralds were beaten 5-0 at home to Killybegs Emeralds the previous week and do not appear to have won any trophies in the period from their foundation in 1891 until 1916.

<sup>7</sup>*DV*, 25 May 1917.

<sup>8</sup>*DP and DN*, 20 Jan. 1917.

<sup>9</sup>See Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: The Culture and Origins of Rugby League Football* (London, 1998), pp 180-8; Richard Holt, *Sport and Society in Modern France* (London, 1981), David Russell, 'Sporadic and Curious: The Emergence of Rugby and Soccer Zones in Yorkshire and Lancashire, c. 1860-1914' in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1988), pp 185-205, p.189 and Tom Hunt, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath* (Cork, 2007), p.166.

Glenties man, Seán Conaghan, who played a prominent role in his own club and in the county board in the 1920s, had some experience as part of the Glenties United soccer team in 1917 and he and Ó Caiside were good friends.<sup>10</sup> This may have influenced his decision to become involved in Gaelic football. It is also clear that the spread of this code in Ardara, Glenties and Kilcar was helped by teachers who were dedicated to the promotion of the GAA, rather than soccer. Joe McDevitt, a nationalist who had been principal of Patrick Pearse's St Enda's school in Dublin, 'was instrumental in setting up the GAA in Kilcar.'<sup>11</sup>

In the south of the county, Aodh Ruadh GAA club delegates Denis Nyhan and J.J. Woods had earlier been influential in the organisation of soccer in Ballyshannon.<sup>12</sup> The GAA also benefited from experienced soccer men such as former Killybegs Emeralds captain Tony Conwell who became involved as a referee while P.K. McDermott of Donegal town was a county board delegate in 1925 and was also known to officiate at matches.<sup>13</sup> It is clear that given soccer's popularity over Gaelic football in the majority of areas in Donegal until the 1920s, many GAA men had been involved in soccer, and as some of these were responsible for organising local sport, if they decided to switch codes then its organisation suffered. Certainly if a small group of men known locally for the arranging of club activities decided to organise an alternative sports club then local players would have no choice but to follow in order to continue as part of a team and as a social group. However, this was by no means a major transformation in codes all over the county.

While this changeover was particularly rigid in the south and south-west, in the north-east, the playing of soccer proved harder to curtail. Soccer continued to be played by many GAA players in this area and some of the difficulties experienced, in particular by the East

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<sup>10</sup>*DP and DN*, 20 Jan. 1917.

<sup>11</sup>Michéal Ó Domhnaill (ed.), *CLG Cill Cartha 1924-1984* (Donegal, 1984), p.10.

<sup>12</sup>See *DI*, 28 Feb. 1896 and *DV*, 17 Dec. 1909. In 1896 Nyhan was a founder member of Erne FC while Woods donated a cup for soccer competition in 1909.

<sup>13</sup>See *DP and DN*, 8 Nov. 1924 and 14 Feb. 1925.

Donegal GAA board, will later be examined as this was a major problem for that body. The composition of a County Donegal soccer selection which played a Sligo XI in 1928 highlights the majority of areas in which it could be said that GAA organisers had failed to make any great impact by this time. Players from Ballybofey, Lifford, Rathmullan, Kerrykeel, Buncrana, Ramelton, Carndonagh, Creeslough and Ballintra all participated and with the exception of Ballybofey, these were areas which had been more or less unswayed by efforts to develop Gaelic football in the county.<sup>14</sup> Of these areas, only Ballintra lies in the south, and the location of the other clubs, which are all in the north and east of Donegal, is perhaps a fair reflection of where soccer could be said to have succeeded.

While the organisation of soccer had been slow up until the 1920s, an improvement in administration, particularly in the north-east and Inishowen, meant that by 1930 soccer in these areas had become a significant threat for the development of the GAA. The presence, or absence, of competitions, as opposed to challenge matches, seems to be a key factor in underpinning success. What is particularly noticeable from figure 5.1 and table 5.1, which illustrate the organisation of knock out or league soccer competitions in Donegal in the years between 1906 and 1934, is both the decline of competitions in the south of the county after 1915 and a scarcity of competitions in the north until 1925. In these years after the collapse of the County Donegal FA in 1898 until the mid-1920s, soccer competitions in the north of the county were restricted to local sports events. The majority of clubs, with the exception of a small number who dared to challenge the more advanced clubs in Derry city by affiliating with their soccer organisations, appeared content to play friendlies.<sup>15</sup> One Falcarragh

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<sup>14</sup>*DV*, 18 Aug. 1928.

<sup>15</sup>See for example, *DJ*, 2 July 1909 and *DJ*, 13 Feb 1911. While the annual soccer competition in connection with the Cranford Sports, first staged in the 1880s, and other sporadically held events such as an 'Inishowen Football Tournament', organised in 1911 as part of Clonmany Church Bazaar, did take place, it should be noted that these were usually held over a day or a few days and lacked a weekly knock-out structure or league basis over which competitions were later staged. The annual Cranford Sports were established in the 1880s and the soccer competition was usually decided over one or two days. The football competition in aid of Clonmany Church was held for a set of silver medals with four teams involved in February 1911.



correspondent, writing in the *Derry Journal*, in calling for soccer ‘to be established on a properly organised basis’, recognised this problem in 1917:

At present there are some good football teams in Donegal. Those in the same district may meet occasionally in a friendly encounter, but seldom or never are the “crack” teams of the district brought together. This state of affairs tends to discourage the game, for it is impossible to sustain the interest and enthusiasm when there is no objective to strive for.<sup>16</sup>

This meant that the GAA was able to step into a vacuum which existed in Donegal by 1919 and provide organised leagues and cups for young men who may have previously been involved in soccer competitions, but were by then restricted to participating in irregularly held friendlies. Certainly there was no guarantee that soccer competitions would be held annually and the short-lived nature of competitions such as the Evans, Woods and Britton cups in the south-west and south illustrate this. This differed to the organisation of cups and leagues in many parts of Britain. Neil Tranter has noted that ‘even in the mining districts of east Northumberland, where organised, codified forms of soccer did not appear until the 1880s, once begun the spread of league and cup competitions was rapid.’<sup>17</sup> He also states that ‘on the eve of World War I the range and depth of league and cup structures (in Britain) was unparalleled in any other sport.’<sup>18</sup> While the introduction of soccer in Donegal had come at a similar time to East Northumberland, the organisation of cups and leagues was sporadic and infrequent as Donegal’s rural nature meant that its economy, populations in urban areas and levels of industry contrasted greatly with the concentrated area of the coalfields.<sup>19</sup> Although the re-founding of the GAA county board in 1919 came as part of Sinn Féin’s nationalist mission, the development of Gaelic games in Donegal was undoubtedly helped by this lack of opposition in the form of a permanent, annual league or cup for all (or even some) of

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<sup>16</sup>*DJ*, 19 Jan. 1917.

<sup>17</sup>Neil Tranter, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain 1750-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), p.26.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>19</sup>Metcalfe, ‘Football in the Mining Communities of East Northumberland’, p.270.

Donegal's soccer clubs at this point. Cup competitions and an organised structure over a season provided additional interest for both players and spectators as enthusiasm would have waned without the challenge these provided. As Metcalfe has noted, 'leagues provided guaranteed games for part of the season, and annual competitions filled the vacant dates.'<sup>20</sup> Without this type of structure in Donegal, there was always the possibility that the organisation of soccer could be challenged by the GAA.

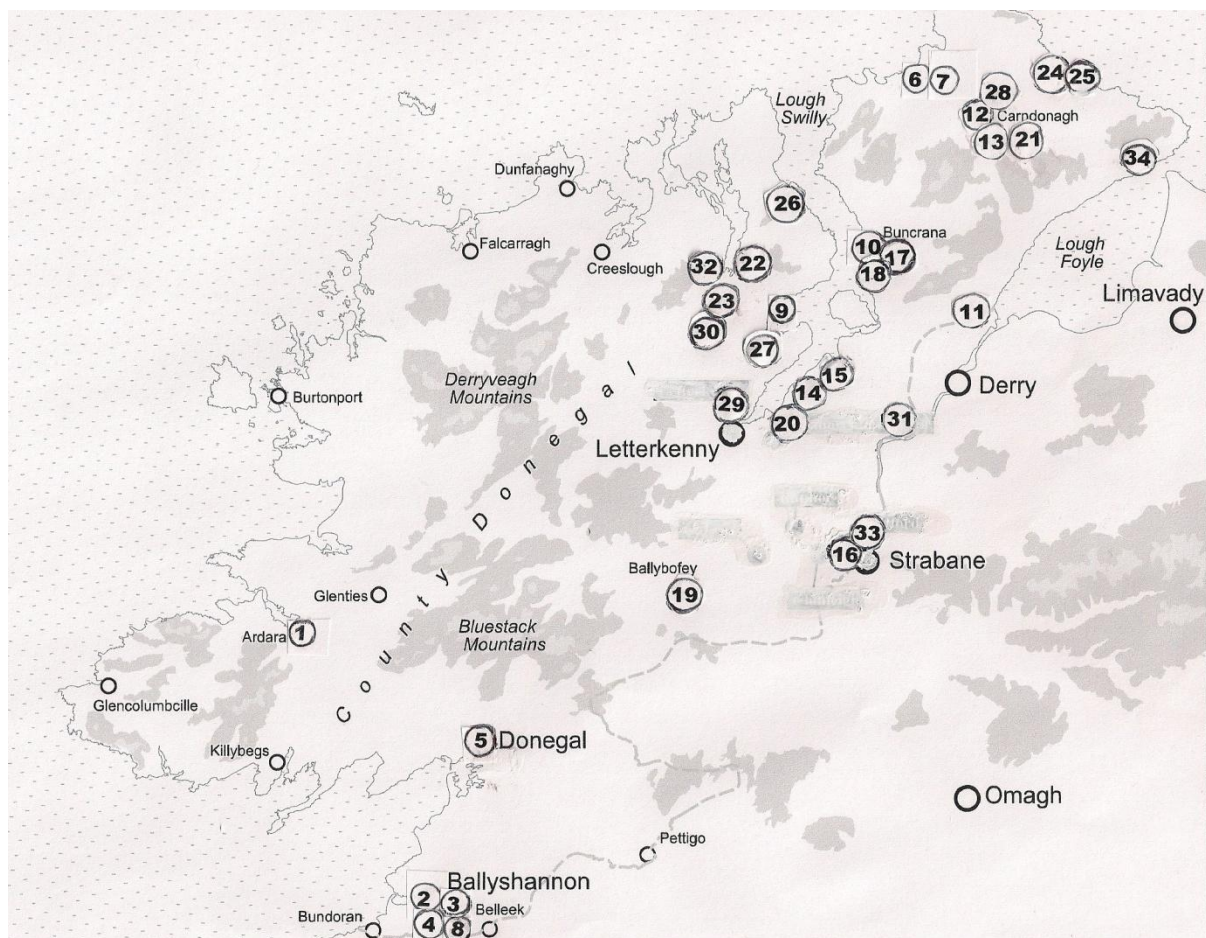


Figure 5.1: Areas hosting Association football competitions in County Donegal, 1906-1934. Sources: *DJ*, *DP* and *DN*, *DP* and *TN*, *DV*, *DI*, *DPP* 1906-34.

<sup>20</sup> Metcalfe, 'Football in the Mining Communities of East Northumberland', p.273.

Table 5.1: Association football leagues, cups and patrons in Donegal, 1906-1934.

Number	Competition and Patron	Years	Number	Competition and Patron	Years
<b>1</b>	Evans Cup-Robert E.L. Evans, bedstead manufacturer	1906, 1907	<b>18</b>	Buncrana Foresters Cup-Unknown	1929
<b>2</b>	Woods Cup-J.J. Woods, publican	1909-10, 1910-11, 1911-12, 1912-13	<b>19</b>	County Donegal Perpetual Cup-William Holmes	1930, 1931
<b>3</b>	Charity Cup-Edward Rogers, shop assistant and publican	1913	<b>20</b>	Newtowncunningham Cup-James Devenney	1931, 1932, 1934
<b>4</b>	St Vincent De Paul Cup -Patron unknown	1913	<b>21</b>	Donagh Cup-P.R. Doherty	1932, 1933-34, 1934
<b>5</b>	Britton Cup-William Britton, watchmaker and jeweller	1913-14, 1914-15	<b>22</b>	Kerrykeel Cup-Unknown	1932, 1933
<b>6</b>	Ballyliffin Cup-Ballyliffin Development Committee	1925, 1931, 1932	<b>23</b>	Milford Cup-Unknown	1932-33, 1934-35
<b>7</b>	Ballyliffin Open & Confined Cups-Ballyliffin Development Committee	1926, 1927	<b>24</b>	Culdaff Parish League-Culdaff Parish Association Football Committee	1933, 1934
<b>8</b>	South Donegal League-Frank Stewart, Cinema Manager	1926	<b>25</b>	Culdaff Parish Cup-Culdaff Parish Association Football Committee	1933
<b>9</b>	Swilly Cup-Swilly Cup Committee	1926, 1927	<b>26</b>	Portsalon Cup-Portsalon Cup Committee	1933, 1934
<b>10</b>	Buncrana Summer League-Buncrana F.A.	1926	<b>27</b>	Mitchell Cup-Carol Mitchell, Wholesale Bottler	1933, 1934
<b>11</b>	Burnfoot FA Cup-J.P. Mclvor, County Councillor	1927	<b>28</b>	Donagh Charity Cup-Unknown	1933
<b>12</b>	Inishowen League-Laurence Nash, Senior Stevedore	1927, 1928	<b>29</b>	Illistrin Cup-Unknown	1933

<b>13</b>	Inishowen Summer League-Laurence Nash, Senior Stevedore	1928	<b>30</b>	Diamond Cup-Mr Diamond	1933-34
<b>14</b>	Manorcunningham Cup-Unknown	1928	<b>31</b>	St Johnston Summer League-Unknown	1934
<b>15</b>	Burt Summer League-Unknown	1928	<b>32</b>	Cranford Cup-Cranford Cup Committee	1934
<b>16</b>	Lifford & District League-Unknown	1926, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1931-31,1934	<b>33</b>	Ballindrait League-Unknown	1934
<b>17</b>	Buncrana Central Cup-Unknown	1929	<b>34</b>	Nash Cup-Laurence Nash, Senior Stevedore	1934

Sources: *DJ*, *DP* and *DN*, *DP* and *TN*, *DV*, *DI*, *DPP* 1906-34. Although every effort has been made to identify these patrons and their occupations, some remain unclear.

Association football competitions were more prominent in the south and south-west of the county than in other areas in the opening two decades of the twentieth century. As can be seen in figure 5.1 and table 5.1, it was in these two areas that five soccer competitions were organised in the period between 1906 and 1915. These were brief affairs, usually held over the winter and spring months and disbanded after a few years due to organisational difficulties or lack of interest.<sup>21</sup> These competitions attracted only a small number of clubs and external entries in a number of these competitions illustrates the generally low level of clubs in the South Donegal area and the financial requirements for the successful running of a soccer club with the vast majority coming from towns, where patronage and facilities were easier to obtain.<sup>22</sup> Why none were organised in other areas in the county may have been simply due to a lack of enthusiasm and patrons. Patronage, a key factor in the development of sport in many areas such as Central Scotland and Westmeath, was crucial for the majority of

<sup>21</sup>See *DJ*, 7 March 1906, 31 Jan. 1912, 19 Dec. 1913; *DV*, 7 Jan. 1910, *DI*, 14 Feb. 1914.

<sup>22</sup>See *DJ*, 23 Feb. 1906 and 16 Jan. 1907, *DI*, 4 May 1906, *DV*, 17 Dec. 1909, 7 Jan. 1910, 31 Jan. 1912, 17 Jan., 7 March 1913 and *DI*, 11 April 1913 and 14 Feb. 1914.

Donegal soccer clubs and without this, many areas seemed unable to organise leagues and cups.<sup>23</sup>

As can be seen in the above table, these patrons were mainly local businessmen in Donegal or those with local club connections, such as Robert E.L. Evans, a Birmingham bedstead fitter and wiremattress manufacturer whose family had lived in Ardara before migrating to England.<sup>24</sup> He was clearly fairly well-off by 1905 when he purchased the trophy as he was able to employ a domestic servant.<sup>25</sup> Patrons were, however, usually those living locally who were eager to encourage soccer in their areas, such as Ballyshannon cinema manager Frank Stewart, Donegal town watchmaker and jeweller William Britton and Carol Mitchell, who ran a bottling company in the north-east. Other trophies were purchased by committees such as those involved in the Buncrana FA and Swilly Cup committee and descriptions of the cups were sometimes given in the local press as an incentive for clubs to register.<sup>26</sup> As Garnham has noted, 'in rural areas some [association] football clubs were founded and fostered by members of the local gentry and their sons.'<sup>27</sup> However, the exact extent of donation of cups for soccer by local patrons in Ulster is unclear and there is scarce evidence that this took place in Westmeath in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, although it is quite possible that it was fairly common throughout Ireland.<sup>28</sup> Again, more research needs to be undertaken on this type of patronage and its effects on the development of soccer in other Irish counties.

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<sup>23</sup> See for example, Neil Tranter, 'The Patronage of Organised Sport in Central Scotland, 1820-1900' in *Journal of Sports History*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1989), pp. 227-47 and Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.164.

<sup>24</sup> Retrieved from [www.findmypast.co.uk/censushousehold](http://www.findmypast.co.uk/censushousehold) search for 6, Knutsford Street, Kings Norton, Worcestershire. Census of England 1881. Public Records Office, RG 11/2950. [Accessed 29 July 2011]

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Census of England and Wales, 1911. Transcription details for 136 Salisbury Road, Moseley, Birmingham. [Accessed 29 July 2011]

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, *DJ*, 30 Jan. 1905.

<sup>27</sup> Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> Hunt, *Sport and society*, p. 170-89.

Given that the Britton Cup was the only weekly competition in the county by 1915, it is hard to establish the effect of the Great War on clubs in other areas as the majority of these were involved only in friendlies. Although it is difficult to trace the exact amount of involvement by Donegal's soccer players in the war, some clubs did lose members at this time and this may have harmed the development of the game.<sup>29</sup> Little mention, however, of the overall decline of clubs was made in the press. Sports clubs in Ireland did not enlist in the same numbers as those in England although there were some exceptions, such as some members of the Wanderers (Rugby) Football Club in Dublin, a club from which thirty-three members lost their lives in the war, and a rugby playing company of the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers.<sup>30</sup> The involvement of soccer players was a personal choice rather than being influenced by club membership. Neal Garnham has noted that initially on a national stage, '[association] football was maintained at such a level that it could divert men from less savoury pastimes, but would not prove an impediment to the war effort.' Leagues in Belfast and Dublin became more regionalised and finance was badly affected, with a reduction in manpower affecting the levels of players and spectators involved, although by 1917 the numbers enlisting had 'slowed considerably.'<sup>31</sup> In 1919 an IFA commission on the reorganisation of soccer in the country concluded that 'the status of divisional associations and a number of the clubs of same had been seriously affected by the war.'<sup>32</sup> The amount of disruption caused by the War of Independence to soccer in Donegal is also difficult to clearly

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<sup>29</sup>See *DI*, 15 May 1915 and *DD*, 17 Feb. 1956. Killybegs Emeralds' player Patrick Murrin was killed in action at Neuve Chapelle on Easter Monday, 1915. Ballyshannon Swifts founder James Sproule Myles was wounded at the Battle of the Somme and later decorated. See also *DV*, 28 Jan. and 24 March 1916. A letter from Corporal Schoales, a native of Letterkenny, to the local press, requesting footballs to be sent to their base in Salonika, indicates the presence of soccer players from the Rosses and Letterkenny in a team he had selected. Two footballs were sent on 25 January by St Eunan's Sewing Guild for Soldiers' Comforts and were gratefully accepted by the Corporal, as shown in a second letter. Corporal Schoales was 'one of three brothers serving at the front' and had worked for the Lough Swilly Railway Company prior to enlisting. He was wounded in action at the Dardanelles.

<sup>30</sup>'Irish war memorials' Retrieved from <http://www.irishwarmemorials.ie/html/showMemorial.php?show=338>[accessed 15 Oct. 2011] and Mike Cronin and Roisín Higgins, *Places We Play: Ireland's Sporting Heritage*, (Cork, 2011), p.90.

<sup>31</sup> Neal Garnham, *Association Football and Society in Pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004), pp 167-74.

<sup>32</sup>Irish Football Association Papers, Minute Book of IFA 1909-1928 . D/4196 A/3 Report of Commission, 20 June 1919, p.269.

establish, but soccer continued to go ahead in 1919. Thirteen teams were involved in a five-aside competition at the Cranford Sports in July of that year and twelve took part the following year, although it is unclear if this annual event was held in 1921.<sup>33</sup> At the Milford Sports in July 1921, fourteen teams took part.<sup>34</sup> What is clear about soccer in Donegal is that no ongoing district competitions were organised in the county from 1915 to 1925 and this allowed GAA organisers to get their games up and running relatively unopposed.<sup>35</sup>

There was only one competition organised in the south of the county in the 1920s and this reflects the dominance of the GAA there in this decade and the transformation in organisation from soccer to competitions in Gaelic games. This delay was probably crucial to the spread of Gaelic football, as GAA organisers faced scarce competition with the failure to form a soccer league until the middle of the decade. The South Donegal Football League, formed on 7 February 1926 in Donegal town was the first attempt to hold a competition there since the Britton Cup.<sup>36</sup> The league had a relatively promising opening season with six clubs taking part on a home and away basis. There were two clubs in Ballyshannon, Erne FC and Ballyshannon Swifts, a team said to be composed of players from the local rugby club; others involved were Bundoran Celtic, Donegal Celtic and Belleek (Fermanagh). The league was not carried on the following season. Alan Metcalfe has also outlined the importance of ‘competent administrators and the development of community support’ as being fundamental to clubs’ survival in East Northumberland.<sup>37</sup> It appears that the development of soccer in South Donegal suffered greatly without these crucial factors. Along with an absence of ambitious, well patronised clubs, the loss of three key organisers was a crucial blow to

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<sup>33</sup> *DJ*, 27 June 1919 and 7 July 1920.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 July 1921.

<sup>35</sup> The Cranford Sports Association football competition was normally played over one or two days. See for example, *DJ*, 27 June 1919.

<sup>36</sup> *DV*, 13 Feb. 1926.

<sup>37</sup> Metcalfe, ‘Football in the Mining Communities of East Northumberland’, p.277.

organisation.<sup>38</sup> The league's president, Commandant Cullen, a man who had shown 'tireless energy...in the promotion of soccer in the district and in the organisation of Bundoran United', left Finner Camp for the Curragh army base in May 1926 while Jim Harbison, who was said to be responsible for the organisation and running of the league, left to join Newry Town in October of that year.<sup>39</sup> The migration of leading official Mr Masterson was also detrimental to the league's continuation.<sup>40</sup> Both Bundoran United and Ballintra had struggled at times to field teams while the involvement of a rugby club suggests a lack of seriousness and perhaps more a means of keeping fit and socialising on their part.<sup>41</sup>

Financially, there is little to suggest that any of the Donegal teams, with the exception of Erne FC, were in a satisfactory financial state. At a meeting held at the beginning of the league, the 10 shilling protest fee was halved, the chairman having stated that this 'was sufficient as none of the teams were wealthy.'<sup>42</sup> There is also evidence that the collecting of admission fees was difficult with supporters watching from the railway line or sneaking in to view matches.<sup>43</sup> This came at a time when GAA clubs were being badly affected by emigration so it is likely that this was also a problem for soccer organisers in the county. Given these difficult factors, it is unsurprising that soccer failed to seriously challenge the position of the GAA in the south and south-west of the county at this time, and it is apparent that Erne FC was the only one of the competing teams still in operation by the end of 1927.<sup>44</sup>

Uniting the county for sporting purposes continued to be difficult. Attempts were made to encourage the spread of association football and bridge the gap between clubs in the north and south of the county but these were also unsuccessful. Matches were organised

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<sup>38</sup>*DV*, 22 May and 23 Oct. 1926 and *DJ*, 8 Oct. 1926.

<sup>39</sup>*DV*, 22 May and 23 Oct. 1926.

<sup>40</sup>*DJ*, 8 Oct. 1926.

<sup>41</sup>See for example *DV*, 20 Feb., 24 April and 29 May 1926.

<sup>42</sup>*DV*, 13 Feb. 1926.

<sup>43</sup>See for example, *DV*, 6 March, 27 March and 3 April 1926.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 10 Dec. 1927.



between South Donegal selections and teams representing Enniskillen and the Derry and District League in Ballyshannon and Derry city respectively in an attempt to raise funds and boost the profile of the game in South Donegal, but had little long term impact in the area despite local interest at the time.<sup>45</sup> These lacked the county-based appeal of Gaelic football with its provincial and All-Ireland championship structure and rivalry which this generated. In his assessment of the social impact of the GAA, Liam Ryan has stated that ‘people identified with parish and county teams with an intensity never reached in any other social organisation whether political, economic, or even religious’ in Ireland.<sup>46</sup> Identification with a Gaelic football or hurling team representing the county was perhaps easier than a regional soccer selection whose players did not have a county championship in which to compete. Soccer clubs, often made up of external players, may therefore have lacked the parish identity which GAA teams could claim. In 1894, clubs from Buncrana and Letterkenny were criticised in the local press for fielding non-locals in friendlies and competitive matches respectively and it was also a problem in the Woods and Charity cups in Ballyshannon in 1913.<sup>47</sup> In any case, the hosting of once off exhibition soccer matches in an urban setting may not have been the ideal way to arouse interest and develop the game. Soccer clubs in South Donegal in 1926 appear to have been generally based in larger towns and the hosting of matches featuring district selections did not lead to the organisation of any clubs in more outlying, rural areas.

With the relatively successful organisation of GAA competitions in the south and south-west by the second half of the 1920s, there was only a handful of soccer teams located in these areas in this decade. Throughout Donegal, many clubs remained at a junior standard rather than making any great progress at provincial or national level in this period with the *ad*

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<sup>45</sup>DV, 10 April, 5 and 12 June 1926.

<sup>46</sup>Liam Ryan, ‘The GAA: Part of What We Are’ in *The Furrow* (Maynooth, 1984), pp 752-64, p.757.

<sup>47</sup>DJ, 7 Nov. and 12 Dec. 1894 and DI, 17 Jan. and 28 March 1913.

*hoc* nature of cup competitions and the failure to maintain a league structure for all of the county. Killybegs Emeralds' continuation illustrates the peculiarities of the development of sport in a peripheral area, and the importance of individuals in the growth of sports' clubs in Donegal. Given their south-west location, their efforts to continue were all the more surprising. The perseverance of this soccer club may be partly due to their earlier tradition of success in soccer competitions and perhaps crucially, the train line into the town meant that clubs could travel for friendly matches in periods when Killybegs were not involved in competition. It also gave them greater licence to travel further afield. They also arranged matches between club selections and were known to take on visiting ships' crews.<sup>48</sup> Ballybofey Wanderers, Killybegs and Ballyshannon met in challenge matches towards the end of the 1920s and early 1930s and were all involved in the 1930 Donegal Cup, won by Killybegs the following year.<sup>49</sup> The Killybegs club was also ambitious enough to enter the Connacht Cup and they won this in 1934.<sup>50</sup> Unlike many areas in the south-west of the county, the town's annual sports organisers were open to soccer and a match against external opposition, such as Strabane, was played annually as part of the Killybegs Regatta and Sports.<sup>51</sup> It is therefore clear that Killybegs Emeralds benefited from the input of local men who were eager to organise soccer rather than Gaelic football, and the tradition of soccer in this area was not forgotten.

The south and south-west contrasted greatly with the north of the county. Evidence for military involvement in the promotion of soccer in the Lough Swilly area does not appear

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<sup>48</sup>*DPP*, 26 March 1932 and 23 Sept. 1933.

<sup>49</sup>See for example, *DV*, 31 Aug. 1929, 15 Feb., 19 April and 7 June 1930, *DP and DN*, 8 and 15 April 1933 and *DJ*, 18 Dec. 1931.

<sup>50</sup>See *DJ*, 3 April 1932 and 2 March 1934 and FAI Junior Committee Minutes, Sept. 1928- April 1932. P137/26. The Connacht cup win by Killybegs was actually the delayed final for the previous season. While generally a competition for Connacht based clubs, which was first organised after the trophy was donated by a Mr Travers in 1927, a number of more ambitious Donegal clubs such as Killybegs, Ballyshannon, Lifford United and Buncrana Rangers were in the draw in 1932.

<sup>51</sup>*DPP*, 1 Sept. 1934. See also *DJ*, 10 July 1931. This arrangement led to local GAA organisers boycotting the event in 1931.

to be a satisfactory explanation for the growth of soccer there. The level of military involvement in soccer clubs in Inishowen may not have been as great as presumed. While teams of the garrisons at Forts Leenan and Dunree did participate in matches against Donegal clubs in the 1920s and 1930s, they appear to have been the exception rather than the norm.<sup>52</sup> Certainly there is scarce evidence that any army officials were involved in the promotion of organised cup competitions in Inishowen. An increase in soccer competitions in that area from 1925 onwards undoubtedly hindered the spread of Gaelic football and in turn further boosted the development of soccer, but these were initiated by local men. In the period from 1925 until 1934, a total of seventeen separate competitions were organised in Inishowen and, while adding to popular support for soccer there, interest in Gaelic football was greatly diminished by this. Writing in December 1934, one GAA correspondent admitted that ‘while Inishowen has come to be recognised as the life spring of hurling in Donegal...soccer has stepped in to supply the people their football requirements, and is therefore the recognised football game of the area.’<sup>53</sup> This was an accurate description of events.

The Ballyliffin Cup, initially hosted in June 1925 to promote tourism was the catalyst for a growth in interest in localised, competitive cup competitions.<sup>54</sup> This cup had been organised by the local development committee. They had initially arranged a challenge soccer match for medals between two Derry clubs, which attracted 1500 spectators, on 24 August 1924 in the village. This was said to be ‘the forerunner to a series of matches’ to be arranged ‘with a view to popularising this splendid health resort in future.’<sup>55</sup> The following month they also organised a match in aid of the Nazareth Fete with ‘over 400 people’ travelling from Derry as part of an excursion for the day. There were ‘over a thousand’

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<sup>52</sup>See *DJ*, 10 and 22 May 1929, 12 Aug. 1932, 14 July 1933, 13 July and 14 Sept. 1934. Teams representing the British Garrison at Fort Leenan appeared in 1929 and 1934. Dunree Rovers were in operation in 1932, 1933 and 1934 and competed in the Portsalon Cup in 1933 and 1934 and in the Kerrykeel Cup in 1933.

<sup>53</sup>*DJ*, 8 Dec. 1934.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 March 1923 and 12 June 1925.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 29 Aug. 1924.

spectators present at the match.<sup>56</sup> Although a number of matches in the Inishowen Gaelic football league had been played there early in 1924, little interest was shown by local organisers in advancing this development.<sup>57</sup> It is likely that soccer was seen as being more attractive to spectators, with its rules more clearly understood in the Inishowen area. Encouragement to play soccer in this area was given by the chairman of the Inishowen District Council in 1924, Patrick Quigley, who was also chairman of the Ballyliffin Development Committee. Another member of the Inishowen District Council, James P. McIvor, later donated a cup to the Burnfoot FA in 1927.<sup>58</sup> These men, who had significant local influence, certainly helped the progress of soccer there, as they showed little interest in promoting Gaelic football. Exceptions were rare. At the presentation of the Culdaff Cup in August 1934, County Councillor, Pat Lynch, advocated that clubs play Gaelic games instead but in general soccer was the choice of code in these competitions without too much debate.<sup>59</sup>

The 1920s were perhaps a crucial time for the development of sport in the area, and it was soccer which then received most support. The poor relationship between GAA delegates in Inishowen and the county board did little to help the promotion of Gaelic football in the region, and soccer organisers undoubtedly benefited from this hesitancy. Association football competitions were also organised in Buncrana (1926 and 1929) while the Inishowen league was staged in 1927 and 1928.<sup>60</sup> In 1932 and 1933 the Donagh Cup took place while competitions for parish teams were held in Culdaff in 1933 and 1934.<sup>61</sup> Soccer cups were also organised in Newtowncunningham in the early 1930s.<sup>62</sup> In this way, soccer organisers in North Donegal were doing in the 1920s what had been done in England in the late nineteenth century to assist the spread of association football. Although it must be noted these cups in

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<sup>56</sup>*DJ*, 19 Sept. 1924.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 21 Jan., 1 and 15 Feb. 1924.

<sup>58</sup>*DP and DN*, 29 Nov. 1924.

<sup>59</sup>*DJ*, 10 Aug. 1934.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 26 May 1926, 2 Jan. 1927, 3 Aug. 1928 and 31 May 1929.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 27 May 1932, 18 Aug. 1933 and 11 May 1934.

<sup>62</sup>See *DPP*, 8 and 29 Oct. 1932.

Inishowen were arranged on a more *ad hoc* basis than the annual county championships and cups offered by the GAA in Donegal, a complete lack of organisation of Gaelic football competitions in Inishowen after 1924 meant that the playing of soccer had little opposition in the form of Gaelic football matches there.

This growing interest in league and cup competitions in Inishowen had a knock-on effect in other areas in the north of the county and the number of soccer cup competitions increased in North-east Donegal in the period from 1926 to 1934. The organisation of cups offered regular matches over a number of months and were usually run by cup councils and committees with affiliation fees necessary to gain entry. They also offered the incentive of a cup and medals for the winners while the runners-up were usually guaranteed medals. In a concentrated region west of Lough Swilly, these localised cup competitions became more popular at this time and the GAA struggled to get a foothold there. This organisation of soccer competitions outside Inishowen was dependent on a network of clubs, all relatively close to one another, such as Kilmacrennan, Rathmullan, Cranford, Kerrykeel, Loughkeel Celtic, Ramelton Ramblers and Milford Celtic. Significantly, local organisers appear to have lacked sufficient interest in Gaelic football to make the changeover. Given the culture of soccer in this area, the re-organisation of the county board in 1919 had little impact. There was no major organisation of GAA clubs in these areas, unlike in regions such as East Donegal, the south and south-west in these early years of the new county board. An attempt in July 1923 which saw visits planned to Milford and Rathmullan as part as a move to organise Gaelic games in the North-west gained little long term support.<sup>63</sup> Traditional soccer competitions, held over one or two days, were unaffected by this new development. A

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<sup>63</sup>DD, 20 July 1923.

Kerrykeel tournament that same month had attracted eleven local soccer clubs while association football was also played at the Cranford Sports in August of that year.<sup>64</sup>

As noted in chapter two, Kerrykeel and Cranford were amongst the first soccer clubs in the county. This meant that a strong tradition of soccer existed there by the 1920s and the first County Donegal FA in 1894 had drawn on a number of clubs from this north-east area. Cup competitions were hosted by Rathmullan in 1926 and 1927.<sup>65</sup> The revival of competitive soccer in this area brought a renewed rivalry and local pride in these competitions. One writer felt that with the organisation of the Rathmullan (Swilly) Cup in July 1926, ‘not since the days of the old Donegal Shield has there been such keen rivalry amongst local teams...the committee were very lucky in securing for the season the field in which the final for the Donegal Shield was played, and I am sure a good many of the grandfathers will remember it.’<sup>66</sup> As Russell has stated in his study of soccer and rugby in Lancashire and Yorkshire in the late nineteenth century, ‘through cup achievements, sports were embedded in local tradition.’<sup>67</sup> He has also noted that ‘in regions where local rivalries were particularly intense...the success of a neighbouring town in a certain sport was likely to lead to other towns redoubling their efforts and thus reinforcing the grip of that sport.’<sup>68</sup> Table 5.1 illustrates the increase in competitions in the area west of Lough Swilly in the first half of the 1930s.

These competitions generally attracted good support from clubs in this north-east district. A five a-side competition organised by Portsalon in May 1932 brought together eighteen clubs while the Milford Cup attracted sixteen clubs later that year.<sup>69</sup> Cup competitions were generally popular in their localities, and reports, although perhaps

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<sup>64</sup>*DJ*, 16 July and 31 Aug. 1923.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 6 Aug. 1926 and 6 July 1927.

<sup>66</sup>*DJ*, 16 July 1926.

<sup>67</sup>Russell, ‘Sporadic and Curious’, p.195.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>69</sup>*DPP*, 21 May and 1 Oct. 1932.

estimates, give some illustration of the level of support for them. The Kerrykeel Cup final between Cranford and Kerrykeel in October 1932 attracted ‘an attendance of approximately 1,000’ while there were ‘over a thousand spectators’ present at the Milford Cup final between Creeslough and Cranford United in 1933.<sup>70</sup> It was noted that at the Diamond Cup final of 1934 between the same clubs ‘over 1,000 people paid for admission’ with a special bus run from Creeslough to Milford.<sup>71</sup> The replay was held before ‘one of the largest gatherings at a game seen in the locality.’<sup>72</sup> These games were generally well received locally. In September 1932 it was reported that the Milford Cup was being supported by local ‘merchants and townspeople’, who had ‘promised the committee in charge of the soccer cup their support, financially and otherwise.’<sup>73</sup> The following month, the club’s victory over Newtowncunningham in a challenge game for a silver cup ‘was the cause of much jubilation amongst the townspeople’ and a victory dance was held that evening.<sup>74</sup>

Despite the interest generated by these relatively localised competitions, only one soccer tournament was arranged to amalgamate the north and south of the county. Organising the entire county was to prove impossible. Unlike the GAA, soccer in Donegal lacked a central promoter or group of men willing to take on the responsibility of arranging an administrative structure for all the clubs in the county until 1930. In April, the County Donegal Perpetual Cup was organised by Ballybofey Wanderers. Its initiation meant that technically, clubs isolated from the hearth of soccer activity such as Killybegs Emeralds and Ballyshannon could compete with northern-based clubs. However this idea was not embraced by the majority of clubs and therefore the name of the trophy was somewhat misleading. As can be seen in appendix 11, there were at least forty-two teams in the county that year. Only

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<sup>70</sup>*DPP*, 14 Oct. 1932 and 7 April 1933.

<sup>71</sup>*DJ*, 9 March 1934 and *DP and DN*, 10 March 1934.

<sup>72</sup>*DJ*, 23 March 1934.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 9 Sept. 1932.

<sup>74</sup>*DPP*, 29 Oct. 1932.

ten clubs participated in the cup's inaugural year and the county was divided into two divisions, with the league winners in each area meeting in the final. Evidently distance, transport and lack of enthusiasm were still a problem as there were no clubs affiliated from Inishowen, West Donegal or the north-west of the county, with the exception of Creeslough Stars.<sup>75</sup>

The development of the cup was hindered by the failure of clubs to put individual problems behind them and work together. The following year, Milford Celtic, Ramelton, Portsalon Celtic, Erne FC and Ballybofey Rangers had all withdrawn with only two new participants, Loughkeel Celtic and Letterkenny Mental Hospital, affiliating along with the initial teams. The withdrawal of Milford Celtic, one of the county's leading soccer clubs, was certainly a blow.<sup>76</sup> This meant that only seven clubs registered for competition out of the overall total number of teams in the county that year which was sixty-two. Even if factors such as expense and the awkwardness of travel are taken into account this is still a poor return. By the beginning of May it was noted that 'the withdrawal of local soccer teams from the northern section of the Donegal cup competition had proved detrimental' to the progress of the Loughkeel Celtic team 'in consequence of the poor standard of play shown in friendly games as compared with league contests.'<sup>77</sup> The cup competition did not take place in 1932. This illustrates the lack of commitment which was necessary for the development of an overall county structure but would also indicate problems with travel and finance and highlights the superior administrative structure, while not immune to these difficulties, which the GAA had in place at the time. It also shows how competitive soccer in Donegal struggled to develop without regular league and cup competitions and many clubs, such as those in the

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<sup>75</sup>*DJ*, 11 April, 1930. The Northern section was instead made up of the clubs of Milford Celtic, Kerrykeel, Creeslough Stars, Ramelton and Portsalon Celtic while the southern section consisted of Erne FC, Killybegs, Ballybofey Wanderers, Ballybofey Rangers and Drumoghill.

<sup>76</sup>*DJ*, 23 March 1931.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 1 May 1931.



west of the county, failed to think in terms of developing relationships with those in other areas such as the north-east.

It was in the mid-1920s that competitive soccer in the north of the county began to receive more attention in the press and from clubs in Derry and in turn, became more efficiently organised. The organisation of adequate transport was fundamental to this development. The rail network was a significant factor in the organisation of the Ballyliffin Cup in 1925-7 and again in 1931 and 1932. In August 1931 it was recorded that ‘the two trains from Derry, Bridge End, Buncrana and Clonmany brought over three hundred persons, and a great number travelled from Carndonagh’ to witness the two matches held on the first Sunday of the month.<sup>78</sup> Travel to this seaside village in the north-east of the Inishowen peninsula was therefore more convenient than that offered in some areas in Donegal which lacked a railway line or tourist attractions. Timetables were published in the press after favourable rates had been secured with the manager of the Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway. The cup committee offered competing teams free journeys in May 1932 as an incentive to participate.<sup>79</sup> This meant that Derry clubs of a higher standard could compete and the vast majority of competitions held in Inishowen were open to Derry as well as Donegal clubs, which added greatly to the standard of play and interest in soccer in this region. At a Ballyliffin Development committee meeting in June 1927, vice-president Patrick Quigley expressed ‘a deep debt of gratitude to Derry and District Football Association’ for their input ‘as it raised the Ballyliffin Summer league to a status above any of its rivals.’<sup>80</sup> Donegal clubs such as Buncrana Celtic were also supported off the playing field and in October 1931 their dance attracted a large crowd from Derry.<sup>81</sup> The influence of Derry clubs in the development of competitive soccer could also be seen, to a lesser extent, in areas outside of Inishowen.

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<sup>78</sup>*DJ*, 7 Aug. 1931.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 May 1932.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 June 1927.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 Oct. 1931.

Eleven competitions were held in the north-east of the county, excluding the Inishowen peninsula, between 1926 and 1934. The Swilly, Portsalon and Mitchell cups and the Lifford and District League all drew outside entries.<sup>82</sup> Donegal's clubs generally managed to hold their own against these external clubs and their participation undoubtedly helped the development of soccer in these areas.

Soccer, rather than Gaelic football, also appealed to visitors such as those from Scotland. An earlier thesis identified the visits of junior teams from Scotland and professionals such as Neil Mochan, Tommy Gallagher and Bobby Bogan to the north-west as later being fundamental to the popularity of the code in Donegal.<sup>83</sup> John K. Walton has noted that in England after the First World War, 'the atmosphere of the beach changed, with the pre-war trend to relaxation and informality in bathing becoming sharply accentuated, boosted by the vogue for sunbathing and more generally for sport and healthy outdoor activity' while the provision of a park for sports and recreation was an important development in Blackpool in 1926.<sup>84</sup> The presence of Scottish holiday makers in the 1920s and 1930s did not go unnoticed by the organisers of the Ballyliffin Cup in their match previews and reports.<sup>85</sup> A number of Donegal clubs were able to attract interest from these tourists. Soccer matches, which would have been more familiar and more understandable to these visitors than those under GAA rules, were organised to accommodate Scottish players while connections with those involved with Scottish clubs were at times mentioned to attract interest in previews. The Swilly Cup committee in 1926 was said to contain ex-Glasgow Celtic player Patsy Gallagher, who was born in a Donegal workhouse, and it was he who kicked off the

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<sup>82</sup> *DJ*, 6 Aug. 1926, 4 and 19 May 1933, 11 May 1934 and *DV*, 5 June 1926.

<sup>83</sup> Derek Doherty, 'The History of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Donegal', unpublished M.A. thesis, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 1998, pp 28-9.

<sup>84</sup> John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 2000), p.97 and p.103.

<sup>85</sup> *DJ*, 3 July 1925, 23 July 1926 and 8 July 1932.

Kerrykeel versus Cranford first round match.<sup>86</sup> Buncrana Celtic were assisted ‘by players of English and Scottish first division teams, at present holidaying in the town’ in their match against Fulton Rovers.<sup>87</sup> Milford Celtic were beaten by a team made up of Scottish drifters in May 1930 while a Scottish selection won the Ramelton Ramblers’ five- a-side competition in July 1931.<sup>88</sup> Occasionally these visitors, such as Joseph Lyons of Glasgow who donated a set of medals for a match between Carndonagh United and Oakwood in November 1931, also acted as patrons.<sup>89</sup>

While these visits may have only been of a seasonal nature, they did help keep the game going and prolonged the tradition of soccer in a number of areas. One newspaper claimed in July 1929, perhaps rather fancifully, that 10,000 Scotch visitors arrived in Derry city over the course of a week and ‘most of these went to all parts of the north-west’ while a Scottish Fair was also held in Letterkenny that month.<sup>90</sup> This annual influx of Scottish visitors appears to have generally been to the north of the county and there is no evidence that the south of Donegal experienced this. This can be explained by the fact that traditional, seasonal migration to Scotland generally did not take place from this area and Scottish links were more prominent in the north and west of the county as a result of this earlier tradition. This adds greatly to R.V. Comerford’s statement that ‘in Donegal, strong links with Scotland meant that soccer was a widely popular sport.’<sup>91</sup>

As noted earlier, the nature of the spread and reach of the Derry city hinterland was of huge significance in heightening interest in soccer in Inishowen and the north-east. The

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<sup>86</sup>*DJ*, 16 and 21 July 1926. A number of other Donegal players born in the north-east went on to play professionally in Britain. These included Charlie O’Hagan, who played for Everton and Tottenham Hotspur and a number of Scottish clubs and Billy Gillespie, who captained Sheffield United to FA Cup Final victory in 1925. News of these players’ progress appeared only sporadically in the local press, however.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 25 July 1928.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 May 1930 and 24 July 1931.

<sup>89</sup>*DP and TN*, 27 Nov. 1931.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 27 July 1929.

<sup>91</sup>R.V. Comerford, *Ireland: Inventing the Nation* (London, 2003), p.226.

foundation of the professional club, Derry City FC, in 1928, added to this interest.<sup>92</sup> The Derry and District FA and the North-West FA were also firmly established by the end of this decade and this senior club attracted much attention from those in Inishowen and North-west Donegal in their Irish League matches. They were also able to secure enticing fixtures against British opponents such as Manchester City, Corinthians and Motherwell.<sup>93</sup> Some local talent in the north-east were also motivated by the prospect of securing a trial with the Derry club and a career in professional soccer. Those who did make the first team, such as Moville goalkeeper Packie Mahon in 1931, drew supporters who travelled from his home town.<sup>94</sup> One Milford Celtic correspondent stated that same year that ‘the opportunities presented to youth where genius is apparent by the recent offer of Derry City to give local talent a try are manifold.’<sup>95</sup> The appeal of Derry City was a source of concern to some Donegal GAA writers. This relatively nearby attraction, which held a higher standard of soccer than that offered locally, was noted by one GAA writer in 1933 who felt that too much interest was being shown by ‘large numbers of east Donegal people, some of them, I am sorry to say, Gaels’ while another stated the following year that ‘here in the east, the maiden city, and its horde of soccer fans, is the attraction.’<sup>96</sup> It was therefore in the late 1920s and early 1930s that the popularity of soccer was really cemented in the north-east and in Inishowen.

Variations in attitudes to the playing of Gaelic football and soccer within towns and villages in Donegal were also caused because certain areas were socially dislocated and struggled to unite under the banner of the GAA, or indeed to form an overall governing body for soccer in the county, due to a number of cultural and geographical factors. However, it must be added that in the 1920s, GAA organisers were able to unite the county more

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<sup>92</sup> Campbell, Dowds and Mullan, *Against the Grain*, p.120.

<sup>93</sup> *DPP*, 2 May 1931 and 26 March 1932.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 and 22 Aug. 1931. See also Michael McLaughlin, *Inishowen's Senior Soccer Players* (Letterkenny, 2004), p.36. Mahon played one game in the Irish league which was a 1-0 victory against Bangor.

<sup>95</sup> *DPP*, 15 Aug. 1931.

<sup>96</sup> *DP and TN*, 28 Jan. 1933 and 3 Feb. 1934.

effectively than their soccer counterparts and this is reflected in their consistently organised, annual competitions. Russell has noted the influence of ‘cultural boundaries’ on the development of sporting patterns in his study of rugby and soccer zones in Lancashire and Yorkshire. He states that ‘it is obvious that certain areas, whether because of topography, urban structure, economic base or more likely a marriage of all three, enjoyed clearly defined cultural patterns and identities.’<sup>97</sup> In particular, ‘the spread of soccer from east Lancashire in the early 1880s stopped virtually at the Yorkshire boundary not because of some mystical force exerted by the boundary line, but because that line runs through the Pennines.’<sup>98</sup> The influence of the geology of a region should also be taken into consideration in accounting for the divergence in interest levels in soccer and Gaelic football throughout Donegal. Certainly the geography of the county meant that some areas remained isolated from each other.

The impact of Derry city on Inishowen has been assessed in chapter one and as noted, the Derryveagh and Blue Stack mountains also created dividing lines between the north-east and the south-west and south. East Donegal, in particular the towns of Letterkenny, Ballybofey and Lifford, lie in the Laggan Valley area where Ulster customs were stronger. This partially accounts for interest in soccer in these areas, although it appears that many players and administrators were Roman Catholic and Protestant influence was probably not as overtly strong in soccer clubs in Donegal as it may have been in some areas within Northern Ireland. Given the majority Roman Catholic population in the county this is perhaps unsurprising and there is scarce evidence that sectarianism led to the organisation of soccer clubs with strict religious divides in the county. It is clear that officials involved in the soccer clubs of Letterkenny, Ballybofey and Lifford in the late 1920s and early 1930s were

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<sup>97</sup>Russell, ‘Sporadic and Curious’, p.195.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p.196.

overwhelmingly of the Roman Catholic denomination.<sup>99</sup> Further north, Roman Catholic officials were also involved in other prominent Donegal soccer clubs such as Loughkeel Celtic in 1931 and Milford Celtic the following year.<sup>100</sup> Certainly the East Donegal area differed culturally from the south and south-west of the county, where the strength of Gaelic football lay by the end of the 1920s.

Another area which differed culturally from the rest of the county was along the north-west coast. There is no doubt that soccer remained very popular there and a number of references in the press highlight this. As previously mentioned, returning migrants from Scotland had been influential to the development of clubs and there is evidence that this interest continued well into the 1920s.<sup>101</sup> Newspaper references to the presence of seven teams in the area in 1927 illustrate the continued strength of soccer over Gaelic football at this point but these appear to have again been friendly matches.<sup>102</sup> However, the number of Gaelic football teams in the area in this decade was low and this problem was discussed on a number of occasions at meetings of the Ulster Council and Donegal County Board. At a meeting of the Ulster GAA Council in Belfast in 1929, the difficulties of spreading Gaelic games into the west coast of Donegal were discussed. It was stated that ‘people in the Irish-speaking districts went across to Scotland and came back with their heads full of soccer. Down in the islands off the Donegal coast, where there was very little communication with the mainland, they played nothing but soccer.’<sup>103</sup> By 1932, a change of sorts from soccer to Gaelic football was underway with clubs in operation in Falcarragh, Gweedore and

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<sup>99</sup> For Letterkenny Rovers 1927 organisers see *DP and DN*, 24 Sept. 1927. For Ballybofey Wanderers administrators see, for example, *DJ*, 4 June, 5 Oct. 1928, 4 April 1930 and 2 Oct. 1931. For Lifford United see *DJ*, 18, 22 March 1929 and 4 Dec. 1931.

<sup>100</sup> See *DJ*, 1 May 1931 and 21 Oct. 1932. The majority of Loughkeel Celtic and Milford Cup officials identified were Roman Catholics.

<sup>101</sup> See for example, *DP and TN*, 9 July, 23 July and 20 Aug. 1927 for references to matches involving clubs representing Gweedore, the Rosses and Kincasslagh.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 June, 9 July, 23 July, 6 and 20 Aug. 1927.

<sup>103</sup> *DD*, 19 Jan. 1929.

Dungloe.<sup>104</sup> Local seven a-sides were being held under Gaelic football rules, such as that in Keadue in July 1934.<sup>105</sup> A junior GAA club was reorganised in Dunfanaghy in October 1933 with former soccer player, Dr Coll, named president.<sup>106</sup> Some areas were hard to change, however. By the early 1930s soccer was well established in Creeslough and the hosting of the 1933 Gaelic football minor county final there in November did not attract sufficient interest for a club to be created as promoted in the press.<sup>107</sup> It seems apparent that in many small villages, with low population rates and only a small number of men controlling the organisation of sport, getting them to change their attitude and transfer to a different code was a difficult process, particularly after the nationalist fervour of the early 1920s had died down.

At a national level, encouragement of soccer in Donegal was poor and the GAA probably benefited from this in the 1920s, despite suffering from its own problems. The majority of clubs and organising committees in Donegal appear to have taken on the responsibility of arranging cup competitions and exhibitions and the general promotion of soccer without much help from either the Irish Football Association or the Football Association of Ireland for much of the period covered in this chapter. While clubs competing in the County Donegal FA in the 1890s were affiliated to the IFA from 1894 to 1898, there is little in their records to suggest that any major attempt was made to promote the game in the county by the latter organisation after this decline.<sup>108</sup> The FAI was formed in Dublin on 2 September 1921 after relations between a number of Dublin clubs and the IFA in Belfast deteriorated and was renamed the Football Association of the Irish Free State (FAIFS) in September 1923.<sup>109</sup> Donegal's geographical position meant that it did not fit into any of the areas under its regional Football Associations. This was because the FAI did not, at least

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<sup>104</sup>*DPP*, 18 July 1931.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 30 June 1934.

<sup>106</sup>*DJ*, 27 Oct. 1933.

<sup>107</sup>*DP and TN*, 2 Dec. 1933.

<sup>108</sup>Irish Football Association Papers, Cash Book of the IFA, 1880-1897. D/4196 S/1.

<sup>109</sup>Garnham, *Association Football and Society*, p.178 and p.181.

initially, have a committee for Ulster clubs located in the Free State. By March 1922 there were 'upwards of two hundred affiliated clubs' in the FAI with regional bodies consisting of the Leinster Football Association, the Belfast and District Football Association, the Athlone and District Football Association and the Munster Football Association.'<sup>110</sup>

While Donegal's GAA clubs of course remained within the area governed by the Ulster Council, and nationally the Central Council of the GAA, after 1922, the county's soccer teams were still rather isolated and a number of these in the north-east of the county continued to enter competitions provided by the Derry and District FA such as St Mary's, Carndonagh and Buncrana Celtic in 1929.<sup>111</sup> The views of the Free State's soccer organisation on the relationship between Donegal's soccer clubs and those in Northern Ireland are unclear. As previously noted, matches between Donegal clubs and those in Derry and Tyrone were quite common but drew little condemnation from either the FAIFS or the IFA, an indication of the lack of attention given to soccer in Donegal from these governing bodies.

An enthusiasm for participation in national competitions was lacking amongst Donegal soccer clubs for much of the 1920s. There is scarce evidence that any of these affiliated to the FAIFS until at least 1928 with the entry of Ballybofey Wanderers and Ballyshannon in the Free State Junior Cup at the end of that year. These teams were grouped with Sligo as the competition was initially regionalised to limit travelling expenses.<sup>112</sup> In the period from 1929 until 1934 only a small number of Donegal clubs entered with Buncrana Rangers, Creeslough, Lifford, Killybegs and Milford Celtic also involved.<sup>113</sup> Given that

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<sup>110</sup> FAI Archives, International Recognition of the Football Association of the Irish Free State, 1922-1956, 17 March 1922. P137/1.

<sup>111</sup> *DJ*, 1 April 1929 and *DP and TN*, 5 Oct. 1929.

<sup>112</sup> FAI Archives, Junior Committee Minutes, Sept. 1928-March 1940, Meeting of organising committee, 17 Sept. 1928. P137/26.

<sup>113</sup> FAI Archives, Junior Committee Minutes, Sept. 1928-March 1940. P137/26. For FAI junior cup draws see 14 Dec. 1928, 20 Dec. 1929, 12 Dec. 1930, 11 Dec. 1931, 8 Jan. 1932, 1 Dec. 1932, 1 Dec. 1933 and 30 Nov.



affiliation fees, travel expenses and referees' expenses all had to be paid these matches would have been costly for these clubs without proper enclosures. It is difficult to establish exactly how much support the FAIFS gave to Donegal clubs, financially and in the promotion of the game. What is clear is that clubs needed to affiliate in order to get any financial aid.<sup>114</sup>

This was understandable and organising committees were meeting in Dublin to discuss the promotion of soccer throughout the country by at least November 1928. A reference in that month's minutes was the only mention to developing the game in Donegal found in the FAI's archives throughout this period. It illustrates that the committee was awaiting 'replies before taking any step' towards the game in Donegal. Without previous or further reference to this, it is difficult to establish which areas were under consideration or who had been contacted. While it does show that efforts were being made at this stage and communications were taking place, this was rather late in regard to the efforts made in Leinster and further south.<sup>115</sup> This lack of correspondence goes some way to prove that the organisation of soccer in Donegal was neglected and soccer clubs in the county were very much left isolated. Whereas the GAA had provincial structures where delegates from county boards met on a monthly basis to discuss progress and rectify problems, the organisation of soccer nationally appears to differ in that attempts to organise areas seem to have been initiated through correspondence from regional soccer administrators.

Provincial organisations were certainly in place, but county structures are more difficult to trace. Developmental patterns appear rather scattered as not every county had a league committee in operation. Local soccer councils did meet of course, but these meetings and competitions lacked the fixed and generally consistent nature of those held by the GAA

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1934. Not all of these Donegal clubs entered each year and there were no Donegal entries in the draws for the 1930-1 and 1933-4 seasons.

<sup>114</sup>FAI Archives, Consultative Committee Minutes 1924-34, 30 Nov. 1932 and 3 Feb. 1933. P137/38.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 29 Nov. 1928. P137/38.

in the 1920s and 1930s. An examination of correspondence indicates that the FAIFS's organising committee appeared to focus on urban areas in their attempts to promote the game and relied on local organisers to report on the state of clubs and competitions.

Correspondence with organisers in Limerick, Kilkenny, Athlone, Monaghan, Mullingar, Wexford and Kildare in 1932 and 1933 illustrate attempts to monitor district leagues and assess progress.<sup>116</sup> This also illustrates the urban based nature of soccer clubs as opposed to the rural strength of the GAA. However, like the GAA, the FAIFS provided assistance with cups and medals and the organisation of exhibition matches and leagues.

Finance was clearly a problem for both Associations. FAIFS Secretary J.A. Ryder felt in 1932 that 'the decision of the government to impose a tax on the game... must seriously hamper junior clubs, all of which have the utmost difficulty in finding funds to meet their commitments.'<sup>117</sup> This appears to be an accurate summary of the financial state of many soccer teams. In November 1932 £15 was granted 'to defray the cost of medals to the winners of the Connaught Cup in past seasons.'<sup>118</sup> Financial assistance was also given to clubs needing help with rental of grounds, which appears to have been a problem for a number of clubs such as Kilkenny FC whose application was passed for a loan of £5 in February 1933 'towards payment of outstanding ground rent.'<sup>119</sup> While exhibition matches such as those in Limerick and Monaghan in 1932 and 1933 were encouraged, there is scarce evidence of any attempts to organise counter attractions to Gaelic games.<sup>120</sup> Attempts to promote soccer in Donegal saw exhibition matches against Derry and Fermanagh selections in 1926 and a Sligo

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<sup>116</sup>FAI Archives, Consultative Committee Minutes 1924-34, 30 Nov. 1932, 3 Feb. and 31 March 1933. P137/38.

<sup>117</sup>FAI Archives, Junior Committee Minutes Sept. 1928-March 1940, Ninth Annual Report, 7 June 1932. P137/26. See also Marcus De Burca, *The GAA: A History* [Second edition] (Dublin, 2000), pp 138-9. This was a reference to an entertainment tax imposed by De Valera's government in 1932 which exempted the GAA and NACA but included other sporting bodies such as the FAIFS.

<sup>118</sup>FAI Archives, Consultative Committee Minutes 1924-1934, 30 Nov. 1932. P137/38.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 Feb. 1933.

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 14 Oct. and 30 Nov. 1932.

selection in 1928 but these were organised locally.<sup>121</sup> Unlike the reports of the Donegal County Board and Ulster Council meetings, where the conflict with soccer was openly discussed, the minutes of committee meetings contain little of the views of soccer officials on the GAA. Disappointment was expressed in the FAIFS secretary's report of 1932 that the GAA was deemed exempt from government tax while soccer was not given this leniency.<sup>122</sup> However, a scarcity of references to Gaelic games in their archives suggests that soccer officials did not worry about rival attractions in comparison to those involved in organising the GAA. The socio-occupational backgrounds of those playing and administering soccer in Donegal will now be addressed.

### **Occupational categories of soccer players in County Donegal, 1891-1915**

As can be seen in table 5.2 below, a total of 286 soccer players named in the local press were positively identified from the period from 1891-1915. 1891 was chosen as the starting date as this was when team lists began to appear in the local newspapers while 1915 was chosen as an end-date as this was when soccer competitions temporarily ceased in the county. A wide range of clubs and teams were looked at although not every player from the selected teams could be identified. This was mainly due to the incomplete publishing of full names and the failure of all listed players to appear in the 1901 and 1911 censuses.<sup>123</sup> The majority of soccer players identified were found to be from the industrial category (44.41%). Tom Hunt has concluded from his study of seventy-five participants in soccer in Westmeath between 1900-1904 that urban teams were generally made up of skilled workers such as

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<sup>121</sup> *DV*, 10 April and 5 June, 1926 and *DJ*, 28 Sept. 1928.

<sup>122</sup> FAI Archives, Junior Committee Minutes 1928-March 1940, Ninth Annual Report, 7 June 1932. P137/26.

<sup>123</sup> The following clubs and teams were used for the purpose of this study: Ardara Emeralds, Donegal Celtic, Killybegs Emeralds, Ramelton, Letterkenny, Milford Swifts, Kerrykeel, Hunters (Milford), Harps (Milford), Letterkenny Rivals, Letterkenny Volunteers, Kerrykeel Wanderers, Milford Rovers, Buncrana FC, Rathmullan, Ramelton United, Bridgend Celtic, Greencastle, Carradoan, Cranford, Carrownaganonagh Shamrocks, Clonmany, Milltown Mills (Convoy), Gleneely, Killybegs Tyrconnells, Killybegs Shamrocks, Dringorman Swifts, Raphoe Rangers, Gortmacall Gems, Loughkeel Celtic, Erne FC, Erne Stars, Ballintra, Ballyshannon Swifts, Cashelard, Doobally, Cashel Heroes, Ballintra Hibernians, Erne 98s, Glenties, Glenties Sunlights, Bundoran De Wets and Ballyshannon Blazers.

tradesmen, shop assistants and clerks or ‘social class c’ as he has termed it. This class made up 67% of all players in Westmeath. The majority of involvement from this section of society correlates with Tranter’s study of soccer players in Central Scotland and Ian Nannestad’s work on Lincolnshire.<sup>124</sup>

The overwhelming involvement of these workers was also particularly the case in some towns in County Donegal. Association football clubs in Ardara, Killybegs and Donegal town in the opening decades of the twentieth century were generally made up of those working and living in their respective towns. For example, the Donegal Celtic team which won the Woods Cup in 1911 mainly consisted of those categorised as part of the industrial sector. It contained a railway shunter, a draper’s assistant, a general labourer, two boot and shoemakers, a message boy, a shop assistant, a merchant, a miller, a solicitor’s general clerk and a farm worker. Only 29.72% of soccer players were found to be working in the agricultural sector with 11.19% coming from the professional category. Just over 8% were from the commercial sector with less than 4% of the overall total categorised as belonging to the indefinite and non-productive classes while the figure for the domestic class was also relatively low (2.80%).

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<sup>124</sup> Tom Hunt, *Sport and society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath* (Cork, 2007), p. 186.

Table 5.2: Occupational categories of Soccer players in County Donegal, 1891-1915.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of players</b>	<b>% of total</b>
<b>1:Professional class</b>	32	11.19
<b>2: Domestic class</b>	8	2.80
<b>3:Commercial class</b>	23	8.04
<b>4: Agricultural class</b>	85	29.72
<b>5: Industrial class</b>	127	44.41
<b>6:Indefinite and non-productive class</b>	11	3.84
<b>Overall total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100</b>

Sources: *DJ, DP and DN, DV, DI* 1891-1915 and 'Census of Ireland 1901 and 1911' Retrieved from <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/> [accessed 28 Sept. 2012]

Table 5.3: Ages of soccer players in County Donegal, 1891-1915.

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of players</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
<b>15 and under</b>	15	5.24
<b>16-20</b>	104	36.36
<b>21-25</b>	75	26.22
<b>26-30</b>	42	14.69
<b>31-35</b>	16	5.59
<b>36-40</b>	9	3.14
<b>41-45</b>	8	2.80
<b>46-50</b>	5	1.75
<b>Unknown</b>	12	4.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100</b>

Sources: *DJ, DP and DN, DV, DI* 1891-1915 and 'Census of Ireland 1901 and 1911' Retrieved from <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/> [accessed 28 Sept. 2012]

Table 5.3 illustrates the categories of ages of those playing association football in Donegal between 1891 and 1915. The majority of soccer players in Donegal (36.36%) were drawn from 16-20 years old age category and the average age of a soccer player in Donegal

was found to be 23.01 years old. Hunt has shown in his study of those playing in Westmeath that the average age of a soccer player was 22.6 years old and therefore Donegal players were slightly older. This figure was also higher than the average age of professional footballers analysed by Neal Garnham which was 22.7 years old.<sup>125</sup>

Table 5.4: Religious Denominations of soccer players in County Donegal, 1891-1915.

<b>Religious denominations of soccer players in County Donegal, 1891-1915</b>	<b>Number of players</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
<b>Roman Catholic</b>	244	85.31
<b>Church of Ireland</b>	9	3.15
<b>Presbyterian</b>	16	5.60
<b>Reformed Presbyterian</b>	4	1.40
<b>Episcopalian</b>	6	2.10
<b>Church of England</b>	1	0.35
<b>Old Church of Ireland</b>	1	0.35
<b>Unknown</b>	5	1.75
<b>Total</b>	286	100

Sources: *DJ, DP and DN, DV, DI* 1891-1915 and 'Census of Ireland 1901 and 1911' Retrieved from <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/> [Accessed 28 Sept. 2012]

Neal Garnham has stated that 'with regard to religion, association football seems to have drawn a mixed following.'<sup>126</sup> He has looked briefly at the role of Catholic educational establishments and the clergy in the spread of soccer in Dublin and Derry respectively in the late nineteenth century and has shown that the majority of schools involved in the Irish

<sup>125</sup> Hunt, *Sport and society*, p. 187.

<sup>126</sup> Garnham, *Association football and society*, p. 66.

Football Association's Schools' Cup in 1883 were Protestant institutions.<sup>127</sup> His analysis of professional footballers in Belfast at the beginning of the twentieth century has shown that the majority (34%) were Presbyterian with Episcopalian Protestants making up 30% while Roman Catholics (24%) were also significantly represented. Methodists formed 6% of the overall total along with other unnamed denominations (6%).<sup>128</sup> The relationship between players, their teams and the local communities was 'often a distinct one in terms of religion' and 'professional footballers reflected the society from which they came, and which they eventually came to represent.'<sup>129</sup> By 1912, Linfield and Belfast Celtic were being seen in the English media as being Protestant and Catholic teams respectively.<sup>130</sup>

Table 5.4 illustrates the religious denominations of those playing soccer in Donegal between 1891 and 1915. 85.31% of soccer players were Roman Catholics. Other religions formed a total of 12.95% with Presbyterians making up 5.60% of this figure while 1.75% of the overall total was unidentified. This differed to Westmeath where Hunt has stated that all seventy-five players sampled were Roman Catholics as 'members of the Church of Ireland were of a higher social status and found sporting fulfilment in the more elitist recreational activities such as lawn tennis, croquet and golf.'<sup>131</sup> This was not the case in Donegal, where these sports failed to gain any widespread support at this time. There is no evidence that any Donegal soccer teams operated on a policy of exclusion of players on the grounds of religion and most clubs and teams seem to have been run on a cross-community basis, although in areas such as Ardara and Killybegs which were predominantly Roman Catholic, there is scarce evidence that players from other religious denominations became involved as players. In contrast, clubs such as Ballyshannon Swifts were at times made up of a mix of religious

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<sup>127</sup> Garnham, *Association football and society*, p.66.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>131</sup> Hunt, *Sport and society*, p. 188.

denominations, but there is nothing in the press to suggest that any clubs came into conflict because of this or that any players were discriminated against. It also illustrates that many Catholics were keen to play soccer and did not see it as a British game or as something that undermined their nationality.

### Occupational categories of soccer organisers in County Donegal, 1891-1915

Table 5.5: Occupational categories of soccer organisers in County Donegal, 1891-1915.

Category	Number of officials	% of total
<b>1:Professional class</b>	56	28.72
<b>2: Domestic class</b>	3	1.54
<b>3:Commercial class</b>	28	14.36
<b>4:Agricultural class</b>	37	18.98
<b>5:Industrial class</b>	67	34.35
<b>6:Indefinite and non-productive class</b>	4	2.05
<b>Overall total</b>	195	100

Sources: *DJ, DP and DN, DV, DI* 1891-1915 and 'Census of Ireland 1901 and 1911' Retrieved from <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/> [accessed 28 Sept. 2012]

In looking at the social backgrounds of those involved in the 1894 Athlone Association Football Club, Hunt has noted the involvement of a large number of those 'associated with the town's business community.'<sup>132</sup> Donegal's urban clubs appear to have been no different in this respect. Those responsible for organising the Woods Cup in Ballyshannon in 1909 were all based in the town and included a solicitors' general clerk, a coach maker, a spirit merchant, a gas works owner and a writing clerk. 195 men who were listed in the local press as having some involvement in the running of soccer clubs and

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<sup>132</sup> Hunt, *Sport and society*, p. 178.



competitions in Donegal between 1891 and 1915 were positively identified for the purpose of this study.<sup>133</sup> The majority of involvement came from those in the industrial category (34.35%) while 28.72% of soccer organisers were identified as professionals. Those involved in the agricultural sector failed to play a major role in the organisation of soccer in Donegal with only 18.98% coming from this category while involvement of the commercial category was found to be less (14.36%). Unsurprisingly the organisational influence of those in the domestic class and students was minimal with less than 4% of these classes involved as organisers. How these figures compared to those involved in the GAA as players and organisers will be addressed in the next chapter.

On many occasions those playing and organising soccer in Donegal did not receive as much publicity as those involved in Gaelic games, with results and fixtures at times completely absent in the press or confined to a line in the local parish news. GAA supporters in Donegal were generally well notified of events and fixtures with regular columns, previews and match reports published regularly. In this way those organising Gaelic games displayed an astute awareness of the value of the press, while the majority of soccer competitions, with the exception of the Ballyliffin Cup, were poorly, and at times, infrequently covered and lacked the somewhat sensationalist and nationalist nature of GAA reports. ‘Assaroe’ openly claimed in 1925 that ‘an appetite for Gaelic news will be created by advertising all entertainments and fixtures, and by the dissemination of spicy items in the

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<sup>133</sup> These included members of the County Donegal FA, the Evans Cup committee, the Woods Cup committee, the Britton Cup committee, Donegal Celtic, Ballyshannon Blazers, Killybegs Emeralds, Erne FC, Ardara Emeralds, Ardara Sons of Tyrconnell, Kilclooney Boyleagh Champion, Donegal Shamrocks, Convoy Celtic, Mountcharles Football & Cricket Club, Dungloe, Dungloe Rovers, the Burnfoot FA, Milford, Ballybofey Hibernians, Rosses Rovers, Gweedore Celtic, Loughkeel Celtic, Ballybofey, Kerrykeel, Ramelton, Ramelton Sunbursts, Letterkenny, Cranford Athletics, The Vindicator FC (Rathmullan), Milford Swifts, Moville, Kilraine Grand Rapids, Manorcunningham, Glenties Hibernians, Downstrands Young Bloods and Castlefin.

local newspapers.’<sup>134</sup> An eagerness to publicise Gaelic games at the expense of soccer in Donegal had, however, been in place since the early twentieth century.

## **II: The GAA and association football in Donegal**

The county’s first GAA clubs and their decline have been looked at in chapter three. There is no evidence that any of these were in conflict with association football clubs but in 1905 the GAA in Donegal certainly became more politicised. The presence of the soccer code undoubtedly affected interest levels in Gaelic football although Donegal was not unique in this respect provincially. As Neal Garnham has noted, ‘by 1905 in some areas of the province [Ulster], association football provided an entrenched opposition to a resurgent and rejuvenated GAA.’<sup>135</sup> Garnham also believes that the GAA’s slow development in Ulster meant that by 1905 soccer there was more firmly enrooted.<sup>136</sup> Certainly this was the case in Donegal at this point. It was the organisation of Gaelic games, and in particular Gaelic football, that was to first challenge soccer as the county’s number one team game and this conflict was to divide public opinion, generally amongst those who claimed that soccer was a foreign sport and that Irish pastimes and games should be promoted, and those who felt that there was no reason why they should not participate in or attend association football matches. As Matthew Taylor has noted, ‘the existence of the GAA with its explicit political nationalism and its ban on what were regarded as “foreign” sports, served to marginalise soccer in certain respects as a unionist and a British, which in this context meant a “foreign”, game.’<sup>137</sup>

According to Paul Rouse, ‘initially, the Ban was introduced for organisational and administrative purposes; it later acquired a political dimension; but it was only in the decades

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<sup>134</sup> *DD*, 13 Feb. 1925.

<sup>135</sup> Garnham, *Association Football and Society*, p.30.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>137</sup> Matthew Taylor, *The Association Game: A History of British Football* (Harlow, 2008), p.105

after independence that it attained extreme ideological importance.<sup>138</sup> Opinion was divided between those who thought it was a crucial part of the GAA's identity and history, and others who felt that the only thing it resulted in was 'the provocation of rampant hypocrisy and deceit within the GAA.'<sup>139</sup> Mike Cronin has stated that 'the introduction of the ban was to ensure the popularity and success of the Association, and in response to the political spirit which dominated Irish life at the time. It was not introduced as a statement of political ideology.'<sup>140</sup> As the twentieth century wore on, there were many who felt that it was becoming increasingly unnecessary, and many who ignored it, as Gaelic games became more firmly established within Irish society although it was not removed from the GAA's constitution until 1971.<sup>141</sup>

It is clear that supporters of the GAA in Donegal, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, were eager to stress a nationalist ideology and dedication to the cause while knowing that those interested in organising soccer could not claim this sense of devotion. While some contemporary Donegal soccer clubs expressed their nationalism through their naming policies, taking on titles such as Celtic, Harps, Hibernians and Shamrocks, they made scarce other efforts to illustrate their patriotism.<sup>142</sup> One likely reason is that some contained non-Catholic members whom they may not have wanted to offend, while GAA players were generally Roman Catholics. Mike Cronin has stated that 'while being established and supported by many at the time of its origin as an apolitical and value-free game, soccer quickly became contentious as it was seen as the property of the outsider.'<sup>143</sup> Problems also included a struggle between the Belfast-based IFA and the Football Association of Ireland

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<sup>138</sup>Paul Rouse, 'The Politics of Culture and Sport in Ireland: A History of the GAA Ban on Foreign Games 1884-1971. Part One: 1884-1921' in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1993), pp 333-60, p.334.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>140</sup>Mike Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity Since 1884* (Dublin, 1999), p.85.

<sup>141</sup>Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London, 2004), p.427.

<sup>142</sup>Examples include Gweedore Celtic, Gweedore Harps, Cashleenan Hibernians and Buncrana Shamrocks.

<sup>143</sup>Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism*, p.124.

for control of the sport. Soccer in the Free State did not receive enough support from the Catholic Church or the new government (after 1922), being viewed as a foreign sport. The failure to take on a professional structure also hindered its development.<sup>144</sup> Added to this, the FAIFS struggled to create a functioning identity for itself at international level.

Although the FAIFS became recognised by FIFA in August 1923, the ‘Home Nations’ refused to acknowledge its status and it was not until 1946 that the Free State team played England. Therefore, initially, club friendlies were played against French opposition to spread interest and the first international fixture organised by the FAIFS was not played until 1926, against Italy.<sup>145</sup> Cronin further believes that with the poor standard of the domestic game and the lack of success of the Free State, and subsequent Republic of Ireland teams until the late 1980s and 1990s, ‘any victory or accomplishment could never be appropriated by the nation’ until these years.<sup>146</sup> This meant that Gaelic games remained the most popular sport in the twenty-six counties for much of the twentieth century, although as noted, in some areas (such as parts of north Donegal) soccer did manage to hold its own and the GAA struggled to penetrate these regions.

The foundation of the first Donegal GAA county board in October 1905 came as part of the nationwide Gaelic Revival at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was also a reaction to the popularity of soccer in the county, the absence of an administrative structure to promote the playing of Gaelic games, and indeed the lack of interest in hurling and Gaelic football in most areas in Donegal. The proposal to run the Evans’ Cup for association football in Ardara in January of that year was met with strong opposition from prominent IRB suspect and writer Seumas MacManus, one of the leading activists in the Gaelic Revival

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<sup>144</sup>Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism*, p. 125.

<sup>145</sup>‘FAI history: The Early Years’ Retrieved from <http://www.fai.ie/fai/history/the-early-years.html> [Accessed 17 Oct. 2011]

<sup>146</sup>Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism*, p.129.

in Donegal and chief Cumann na nGaedheal organiser in South Donegal. He felt that the competition should be played under the rules of Gaelic football as he saw association football as a ‘foreign’ sport and expressed his discontent in a series of letters published in the local press. Prior to this, the playing of association football within Donegal society was unchallenged and MacManus’ call to have soccer clubs replaced by those of the GAA appears to be a unique attempt within Irish society at this time.

With the decline of Gaelic games in Donegal by 1908, soccer was again relatively unhindered until the county board was reorganised in 1919. It was not until the 1920s that the GAA began to gain a foothold within Donegal and this was reflected in an increased support for Gaelic games in this decade. However this was a difficult struggle for Donegal’s GAA organisers and while they benefited from the lack of competitive soccer in the county in the first half of this decade, the growth in the number of soccer competitions organised in the years after 1925 further hampered the spread of Gaelic games. This was not well received by some GAA supporters.

The conflict between organisers of these codes in Donegal was most publicly expressed through the local press. At times both soccer and GAA organisers were in dispute over their perceived origins of Gaelic games and soccer. Many GAA supporters, while claiming that Gaelic games were Irish sports which had patriotic ties, felt that involvement in soccer was an illustration of West Britonism. Throughout the 1920s, GAA members continually expressed pride, and at times appear to have been preoccupied, about their organisation’s perceived struggle against those organising soccer in Donegal. At the Donegal GAA Convention in January 1929, chairman, Seán Ó Caiside claimed that ‘a most determined effort had been made during the past twelve months to torpedo the Gaelic

movement in Donegal.’<sup>147</sup> This was a clear reference to the organisation of soccer and as will be seen, reflected the continuous rhetoric of those within the county board in regard to their struggle to gain a monopoly on sport in the county.

Soccer organisers generally took on a more pacifist approach against this attitude but occasionally some felt compelled to defend their efforts. In a letter to the editor of the *Derry Journal* published in October 1928, Henry McGowan, the secretary of Ballybofey Wanderers AFC, claimed that ‘for the past year the people who control the GAA in Donegal have been carrying on a campaign of abuse against those interested in Association football in this county.’<sup>148</sup> There can be no doubt that a campaign of this nature was underway at that time. There is evidence that county board members were directly involved in the writing of GAA news, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s. GAA reporters such as John Tuohy of Dungloe, writing as ‘Banner County’ and Brother Cassin, under the penname of ‘Assaroe’, were later identified.<sup>149</sup> One county board delegate, in a letter to Seán Ó Caiside in 1933, illustrated his views on using propaganda when he wrote: ‘that’s a great idea about the journalism... Yes I’m powerful with the pen. Feel like Kickham or Davis when I start on the GAA spirit stunt.’<sup>150</sup> The fact that GAA columns were generally written using pen-names perhaps made it easier to criticise given the rural nature of Donegal and small population rates where those involved in sport tended to be well known locally, a fact that did not go unnoticed by McGowan who called on those criticising soccer to reveal themselves.<sup>151</sup>

In examining the conflict between rugby and soccer organisers in Northern England in the late nineteenth century, Tony Collins has noted the support given by some rugby union officials to soccer and the transferral of teams such as Manningham to the latter game, in

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<sup>147</sup> *DV*, 19 Jan. 1929.

<sup>148</sup> *DJ*, 5 Oct. 1928.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Dec. 1926 and 17 Feb. 1928.

<sup>150</sup> Donegal GAA Archives, Letter from S. Maguidir to Seán Ó Caiside, 15 March 1933. GAA/1/4/1(1) (8)

<sup>151</sup> *DJ*, 5 Oct. 1928.

addition to growing popular support for association football, as having a demoralising effect on rugby in the area in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. The formation of the Northern Rugby League in 1901 was ‘the major initiative to secure the N[orthern] U[nion] dam against the tidal wave of soccer’ although this league did not have any great success.<sup>152</sup> In addition to earlier measures undertaken to counteract the spread of soccer by the GAA, reports of GAA meetings in the 1920s illustrate an aggressive attitude towards the playing of soccer in Donegal.<sup>153</sup> Counteracting ‘foreign games’ through the organisation of clashing fixtures had in fact been recommended by the Central Council of the GAA along with the appointing of vigilance committees to report members involved in banned sports at a special meeting held on 17 August 1924 in Dublin.<sup>154</sup> As will be seen later, cross-over from GAA to soccer was a big problem for GAA organisers. Provincially, the Ulster Council were also less than happy with having to compete with association football. At a reorganisation meeting in Clones on 22 October 1921, the founding of the FAI did not go unnoticed. It was moved ‘that counties are hereby warned against countenancing any activity of the Football Association of Ireland.’ This was felt necessary as the FAI was deemed to be ‘as much antagonistic to [the] GAA if not more so than [the] IFA.’<sup>155</sup>

Nationally, the playing of soccer was defended in newspapers such as *Football Sports Weekly* which ran for a brief period in the 1920s while the *Gaelic Athlete* in turn was eager to attack association football while promoting Gaelic games. While initially the majority of GAA coverage in Donegal was limited to sporadic match reports with no fixed sports page or columns (an exception being the *Derry People and Donegal News* front page column in 1905), by the 1920s an increase in GAA activity in the county meant that fixed columns

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<sup>152</sup>Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp 180-8.

<sup>153</sup>See for example, *DJ*, 13 Aug. 1928.

<sup>154</sup>GAA Archives, Croke Park. Central Council Minute Book 1911-1925. GAA/CC/01/02. Central Council Special Meeting 24 August 1924. p.748.

<sup>155</sup>Ulster GAA Council Minutes, Vol. 1, Reorganising Meeting. 22 Oct. 1921.

composed by GAA writers began to appear more regularly in the local press. Although the GAA's hierarchy were said to be unhappy with the amount of coverage given at national level until a change took place in the early 1930s with the introduction of *The Irish Press*, Gaelic games in Donegal appear to have been reasonably well covered at a local level.<sup>156</sup> There were five local newspapers circulating in Donegal in 1905 and it was through the medium of the press that arguments for the promotion of the GAA were most publicly expressed. This was done by raising awareness of the state of these and other sports through the publishing of match reports, results and related letters and the writing of propagandist articles. Advertising of cup competitions, matches and social events was also helpful in bringing these sports to the public's attention.

The *Derry Journal* was first published in 1792 and the soccer-Gaelic football debate started by Seumus MacManus in 1905 was disseminated through this newspaper. However its stance on politics was perhaps moderate-nationalist and other sports such as soccer and cricket continued to be covered in a neutral manner. This led to MacManus complaining about the lack of GAA coverage in the newspaper in September 1905 and he labelled it 'a posing nationalist organ' after it had given only a quarter of a column to the Tyrone-Donegal Ulster hurling championship semi-final while giving a full column to soccer news.<sup>157</sup> The *Derry People and Donegal News* was first published in 1902 and initially provided reports on soccer competitions such as the Tyrone and Donegal Football Cup. However, by 1905 the newspaper had become a strong advocate of the Irish-Ireland movement and encouraged the spread of Gaelic games, the Irish language and Irish industry while condemning the playing of association football in Donegal. The policy of this newspaper was illustrated when its editor stated that he hoped that the Grand Camán Parade 'would capture all that is good in the

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<sup>156</sup>Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: A People's History* (Dublin, 2009), p.192.

<sup>157</sup>*DP and DN*, 30 Sept. 1905.



young Irish manhood of the North, and leave only the dross to mate with “Mr Thomas Atkins” on the Association football field.’<sup>158</sup>

The *Londonderry Sentinel*, a Unionist paper founded in 1829, at times provided a forum for the criticism of Gaelic games through the publication of reports and letters.<sup>159</sup> The *Donegal Vindicator* was organised by a number of those involved in the Land League and went into circulation on 4 February 1889, apparently to counter the *Donegal Independent* which had focused on attracting the readership of the Ascendency in the town.<sup>160</sup> Both these Donegal newspapers covered Gaelic games and soccer although with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The *Donegal Democrat* did not come into publication until 16 June 1919.<sup>161</sup> While originally claiming to be ‘a non-political newspaper in a world of politics’ but rather contradictorily expressing a desire to ‘uphold anything that will further the national and local interests’ the newspaper quickly developed a ‘fairly militant nationalist policy.’<sup>162</sup> Raids on its premises during the War of Independence by police and British soldiers further stiffened its resolve and with the development of the GAA county board through the 1920s, the newspaper became the organ of this sporting body in South Donegal and at times seemed almost too eager to criticise the playing of soccer in the area while generally refusing to publish results of local matches or do anything positive to contribute to its development. Another local paper, the *Donegal People’s Press*, was first published in Lifford in 1931 and appears to have had a fairly neutral policy on the GAA and soccer with reports on games

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<sup>158</sup>*DP and DN*, 30 Sept. 1905.

<sup>159</sup>See, for example, *LS*, 21 Nov. 1905, 3 and 17 May 1906.

<sup>160</sup>John Ward, ‘Pa McAdam-the grandfather I never knew.’ Retrieved from <http://www.vindicator.ca/history/vinStory/vinStory1.html> [Accessed 31 Oct. 2010]

<sup>161</sup>‘Donegal Democrat-Democrat history’ Retrieved from <http://www.donegaldemocrat.ie/CustomPages/CustomPage.aspx?PageID=56736> ‘Donegal Democrat-Democrat History’ [Accessed 30 Oct. 2010]

<sup>162</sup>*Ibid.*,

reasonably free of spitefulness. By September 1932 it claimed to have ‘the largest circulation of any paper published in Donegal.’<sup>163</sup>

Two of these papers were published in the south of the county in Ballyshannon and unsurprisingly had a tendency to focus on events in this area. These were the *Donegal Vindicator* and the *Donegal Independent* which were weekly newspapers. The three others were based outside the county in Derry city, these being the *Derry Journal* which was published thrice weekly while the *Derry People and Donegal News*, like the Ballyshannon newspapers, left the printers at the weekend. The *Londonderry Sentinel* which also covered events in Derry and Donegal, was circulated three times a week. Dublin weekly-based newspaper *Sport* also included reports on sporting events in Donegal but these were published more sporadically and were often based on locally published reports as the newspaper did not comprehensively cover regional events.

While the period from 1893 until 1905 had seen little activity in the promotion of Gaelic games in Donegal despite the sporadic publishing of GAA results, the lack of Gaelic games in the county was also beginning to draw attention in the local press in the late 1890s and early years of the twentieth century. In 1897, 1898, 1902, 1904 and again in February 1905, isolated attempts to propagate the playing of Gaelic games in the local press were made. This was done through questioning the lack of interest in these sports in the county.<sup>164</sup> These failed to have any major impact on the choice of sport in Donegal. Efforts to organise the Evans Cup in 1905 were met by what one correspondent called ‘a campaign of impudent abuse’ in South-west Donegal.<sup>165</sup> This was a reference to attempts begun by Seumas MacManus in March 1905 to promote Gaelic games at the expense of association football and in doing this he tried to portray soccer as a foreign game and those involved as West

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<sup>163</sup> *DPP*, 10 Sept. 1932.

<sup>164</sup> See *DV*, 7 May 1897 and 14 Feb. 1902 and 10 Feb. 1905, *DJ*, 30 Nov. 1898 and *DI*, 7 Oct. 1904.

<sup>165</sup> *LS*, 17 Aug. 1905.

Britons. This debate was facilitated in the *Derry Journal* and the *Derry People and Donegal News* throughout 1905 and 1906.

Gaelic football and hurling on a codified basis had not been introduced to the south of the county prior to 1905. These games soon became a vehicle for MacManus to rally the youth of the area into becoming more involved in the playing of Irish sports, the use of the Irish language and in the promotion of Irish industries and pastimes. Mike Cronin has stated that ‘cultural nationalists recognised that to fully mobilise opinions behind their goals, indeed to achieve those goals, all elements of British rule had to be removed from Ireland. This included British habits, customs, language and their sports.’<sup>166</sup> MacManus began his press campaign by using the nationalist card and claiming that Donegal, despite being ‘one of the most Gaelic counties in Ireland’ was not doing its duty, in continuing with ‘games introduced by the foreigner.’<sup>167</sup> He also, rather provocatively, called for a meeting of the Donegal soccer clubs to take place at Letterkenny when the season was over and for those present to ‘resolve to introduce the Gaelic game throughout the county, and to open next season patriotically.’ This, he felt, would see ‘the conclusion of the Association regime.’<sup>168</sup> He ended his letter by appealing to Ardara Emeralds FC to donate the Evans’ Cup for Gaelic football in South-west Donegal. This appeal was met with apathy by the majority of soccer clubs in the county. It was only in the district where MacManus resided that any real effort to change was made. Even then, only two clubs promised to make the changeover. These were the Donegal Celtic and Mountcharles Hibernians clubs, but it quickly became apparent that the former club were eager to continue playing soccer.<sup>169</sup> The failure of MacManus to immediately offer any alternative football no doubt hindered these plans.

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<sup>166</sup> Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism*, p.78.

<sup>167</sup> *DJ*, 1 March 1905.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 May 1905 and 11 May 1906.

The Ardara club's response was rather timid but they refused to give in to MacManus and chose largely to ignore him. They were undoubtedly sensitive to the political situation at the time but it is clear that the majority of soccer players and administrators there still saw themselves as being nationalist despite his pressure. In November 1905 they held a debate to decide which code was best and the majority decided they were more familiar with the rules of association football.<sup>170</sup> Criticism in the press did not stop the Evans Cup tournament going ahead under association rules in the spring of 1906 and the Ardara Emeralds were eager to illustrate their patriotism despite it being played under soccer rules. In preview of the final they listed a number of prominent members whom they claimed 'may be relied upon to take, without precipitate and fanatical action, every necessary chance to further the national cause.'<sup>171</sup>

Mike Cronin believes that due to soccer's association in Ireland as a foreign game, and the FAIFS' conflict with the IFA over international recognition, its organisers had to 'work twice as hard as the GAA to prove its nationalist credentials.'<sup>172</sup> Defining nationalism in the early 1900s was problematic and usually it was the playing of soccer which received the most criticism in the newspapers mentioned above. It is clear that there were a number of approaches to what constituted nationalism. Despite the pressure in the local press, it is clear that many members of association football teams in Donegal in the early years of the twentieth century were also involved in the national revival and that before MacManus' press appeal, there was little pressure exerted on these clubs to switch to Gaelic games. Irish was spoken at the post-match entertainment after the match between Erne FC and Bundoran in 1901 and traditional Irish songs were sung.<sup>173</sup> A number of the Evans' Cup committee had subscribed to and been involved in the hosting of the Ardara Gaelic League festival in

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<sup>170</sup> *DJ*, 10 Nov. 1905.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 April 1906.

<sup>172</sup> Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism*, p.124.

<sup>173</sup> *DI*, 15 Nov. 1901.

1902.<sup>174</sup> Many soccer players were eager to continue and saw no reason to change despite having their nationalist identity challenged in the press. They also came under pressure at meetings.

Meetings of clubs and organisations were also used to raise interest in switching to Gaelic football. MacManus had continued his appeal for soccer to end at a meeting of the district council of the Gaelic League, *Coiste Ceanntair*, which was held in Donegal town on 8 April 1905. It was at this gathering that resolutions were made ‘to discard the English Association football.’<sup>175</sup> On 16 April 1905 Donegal Celtic held a meeting where they were said to have promised to do this and two delegates, John McBrearty and John McGinty, were appointed to travel to Ardara to encourage ‘the general adoption of the Gaelic games throughout South-west Donegal.’<sup>176</sup> There is no evidence that these men undertook this journey or that the Donegal town soccer club ceased their activities. In fact they continued the following season and managed to retain McBrearty and McGinty, who turned out in the Irish Junior Cup against Erne FC at the end of October 1905.<sup>177</sup> In any case, Gaelic football in the town was slow to get organised and the Balldearg GAA club was not formed there until that same month.<sup>178</sup> Even so, adhering to Gaelic games proved difficult for members and they were later condemned for this in the press on a number of occasions.<sup>179</sup> Clearly members of local nationalist groups were not immune to the lure of soccer. At the Evans’ Cup match between Donegal Celtic and Killybegs Emeralds on 10 March 1907, it was reported that ‘out and out Gaelic Leaguers so dubbed’ were present and ‘cheered vociferously for the Celtic team, indicative most certainly that they were in full accord that

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<sup>174</sup> *DJ*, 18 August 1902.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 April 1905.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 April 1905.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Nov. 1905.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 Oct. 1905.

<sup>179</sup> See for example, *DP and DN*, 24 Feb. and 26 Oct. 1906 and *DI*, 8 Feb. 1907.

day with foreign imitations.’<sup>180</sup> At the end of July 1908 cricket was being played in Donegal town and a number of former Baldearg camán players were also involved in cricket in 1910.<sup>181</sup>

The condemnation of ‘English sports’ was not uncommon in Westmeath around this time, as noted by Tom Hunt, although the playing of cricket appears to have received the majority of criticism in the local press there.<sup>182</sup> The standard of play in the latter sport was also ridiculed there while MacManus’ attack appears similar to T.F. O’Sullivan’s press campaign against rugby in County Kerry in the early 1900s.<sup>183</sup> This approach of mocking sports which were perceived as unpatriotic was used in the Donegal papers too. The clubs of Donegal Celtic and Mountcharles Hibernians apparently enjoyed refreshments ‘in the shape of tobacco chews’ after their match in October 1905.<sup>184</sup> A common tactic used by cultural nationalists was to blame soccer organisers for trying to poach or entice players through bribery around this time. Seamus MacManus felt it necessary to mock the low level of entries in the Evans Cup competition in 1906 and sarcastically claimed that ‘medals were to be pelted at them whether they won or lost.’<sup>185</sup> However, this criticism did not lead to the demise of soccer in Donegal at the time, largely due to a lack of public support for Gaelic football and the strength of association football.

While at least fourteen GAA clubs fielded Gaelic football teams from 1905 to 1907, these were not of a sufficient number to mount any serious challenge to association football.

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<sup>180</sup> *DI*, 15 Mar. 1907.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 Aug. 1908 and *DP and DN*, 21 May 1910.

<sup>182</sup> Hunt, *Sport and Society*, pp 193-6.

<sup>183</sup> Richard McElligott, ‘Forging a Kingdom: The Establishment and Development of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Kerry, 1884-1924,’ unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University College Dublin, 2011, pp 129-32.

<sup>184</sup> *DI*, 27 Oct. 1905.

<sup>185</sup> *DP and DN*, 5 May 1906. See also *DV*, 5 Dec. 1919. Ulster GAA Council secretary Eoin O’ Duffy claimed in 1919 that an attempt had been made by ‘an official of the Derry soccer council’ to bribe the Donegal GAA county secretary John Curran with the offer of a cup, financial aid and the organisation of a soccer competition. It is difficult to prove whether or not this attempt was made but the organisation of soccer in Donegal did not improve at the time.

Part of the problem for the GAA in Donegal was that soccer was considered a better game than Gaelic football at that time, and its rules were more commonly understood. Neal Garnham believes that ‘in short, when compared to its rivals, association football was a simple, cheap, exciting and safe sport that offered a measure of satisfaction to those who partook in it with only a minimal risk.’<sup>186</sup> Association football was defended in the Donegal press by a small number of men who highlighted its strengths. ‘Inniskeel’ felt that the advocates of Gaelic games had made a ‘tactical mistake’ in forcing their sports upon the people when they ‘should have been taught gently and gradually.’<sup>187</sup> Soccer, he claimed, was simply a better game and was more commonly understood than Gaelic football, which he considered ‘a mongrel game.’<sup>188</sup> After the foundation of the county board in October 1905, Killybegs Emeralds’ manager Thomas Ward wrote to the organisers to say that ‘he and his Killybegs boys, having considered the matter, found that the Irish game was inferior, and that they, consequently, would be sticking to the association football which they had been playing.’<sup>189</sup> Others were well aware that the image of the two codes was unfairly being manipulated in the press by MacManus and refused to be intimidated. Barnesmore man Alfred C. Ward also wrote to the GAA to say that ‘the people of his district were not willing to take up the Irish games so long as “certain individuals” were at the head of the propaganda in this county.’<sup>190</sup>

It is clear that the rules of soccer were simply more clearly understood in Donegal at this point and the game was very enjoyable for many, while Gaelic football in the county was a rather unknown quantity. There was generally little criticism of soccer in the north of the county although there were one or two exceptions. The proposed annual soccer match at the

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<sup>186</sup>Garnham, *Association Football and Society*, p. 40.

<sup>187</sup> *LS*, 17 Aug. 1905.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>189</sup> *DJ*, 17 Nov. 1905.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*,

1906 Cranford Sports led to complaints from ‘Gael’ in the *Derry Journal* about prizes being given to ‘foreign sports.’<sup>191</sup> In their defence the committee said it was too late to cancel this but would be glad to see an exhibition of Gaelic football being given and offered ‘a substantial prize’ for the winners.<sup>192</sup> There is no evidence that this took place; the soccer match went ahead anyway.<sup>193</sup> In a number of cases such as this and the Evans’ Cup, the organisers firstly attempted to appease those applying the pressure by agreeing to have Gaelic football organised but then went ahead with soccer as there was more interest in this. There were clearly problems with the dissemination of Gaelic football within Donegal society at the time and there is scarce evidence of the organising of any exhibition matches, or planned instruction, in schools or at public events, being undertaken to promote the game. While the progress of the GAA after 1906 declined with MacManus’ absence, it could be argued that he triggered an anti-soccer attitude among those who otherwise may have been neutral through his appeal in the press and also, in raising the profile of the GAA within the county, began to draw attention to a matter which up until that time had been relatively conflict free.

With the lack of activity in the Donegal GAA between 1908 until 1919, there was a decline in criticism of soccer in the local press although it continued to be condemned in the *Derry People and Donegal News*. The playing of soccer, rather than Gaelic football, in Donegal town drew attention in 1913 and 1914 but these criticisms were rather isolated.<sup>194</sup> Generally this was relatively quiet in comparison with the 1905-8 period and with the years after 1919, as the GAA suffered from lack of interest in most areas. By the 1920s with the Association beginning to get a foothold in Donegal, its organisers felt threatened by soccer and some were determined to keep it out now they had got their clubs and competitions up

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<sup>191</sup> *DJ*, 14 May 1906.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 May 1906.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 July 1906.

<sup>194</sup> *DP and DN*, 18 Oct., 13 Dec. 1913, 21 Feb., 7 March and 9 May 1914.



and running. Gaelic football had gradually become more accepted within Donegal society in the 1920s and its rules more commonly known. This gave administrators more clout within society and condemnation was frequently expressed when soccer was played or plans to hold competitions under association football rules were unveiled. GAA writers attempted to promote Gaelic games not only through their criticism of soccer but also through floating ideas in local newspapers. Generally this was done in the hope that by questioning the lack of GAA activity, or the growth of soccer in certain districts, some locals would take note and make an attempt to get clubs up and running. ‘Searchlight’ feared that a rise in the playing of soccer in Ballyliffin, Buncrana and Bundoran in 1926 would ‘mean that Gaelic in Tír Conaill was becoming obsolete.’<sup>195</sup> Others felt these matters could be remedied. One GAA writer lamented the absence of entries for the Democrat Cup in 1928 from the areas of Ramelton, Milford, Kerrykeel, Creeslough and Kilmacrennan and felt that ‘all that is wanted is some energetic person to take up the matter.’<sup>196</sup>

Intimidation was also used by over zealous writers. The Kilmacrennan soccer club were labelled ‘shoneens’ in 1923 and readers were assured that ‘before long, Gaelic games will be played on a firm footing in the locality.’<sup>197</sup> Those in Kilmacrennan, Creeslough and Dunfanaghy who had shown no interest in forming GAA clubs by 1933 were told that the GAA had ‘a claim’ on them in an attempt to get clubs organised.<sup>198</sup> At this point it was becoming clear that soccer was the number one pastime in these three villages and this was thus an over-simplification of the challenge facing the GAA in developing their games there. This type of writing was generally designed to undermine the efforts of soccer promoters in the hope that the public would view Gaelic games as being more worthy of participation than

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<sup>195</sup>*DP and TN*, 12 April 1926.

<sup>196</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 May 1928.

<sup>197</sup>*DD*, 20 July 1923. ‘Shoneen’ was a derogatory term used to describe an Irish person said to be imitating English conduct.

<sup>198</sup>*DP and TN*, 27 May 1933.

those banned under GAA rules. However there is little to suggest that anything was done in the immediate aftermath of this targeting. Others felt that advantage should be taken of a lull in soccer activity in order to get the GAA up and running in areas where its codes were weak. In 1931 a correspondent stated that ‘soccer has disappeared around the Lifford district, so the time is ripe to affiliate a Gaelic club and keep the red flag down.’<sup>199</sup> An examination of county board correspondence also highlights a number of delegates’ views on this conflict. The failure of the Buncrana soccer team to fulfil a fixture in April 1933 was thought by one GAA administrator to be a result of hurling and Gaelic football activity in the town while he also stated that ‘it is a pity that Lifford and a few more are not finished up too.’ This was because Gaelic games were said to be attracting limited support there.<sup>200</sup> Clearly attempts to organise clubs were done with one eye on what was happening within soccer circles. One county board delegate offered his congratulations in a letter to Ó Caiside in December 1933 when he stated that ‘your re-organisation scheme has done more to kill foreign games than was done for the last ten years.’<sup>201</sup>

Those organising soccer in Ballyshannon, Letterkenny and Ballybofey were particularly targeted through the press. Certainly in these more urban areas, it would have been harder to monitor GAA players’ activities given the wider choice of sport available and the larger populations. By 1926, Letterkenny was the second largest town in Donegal with a population of 2,308 while there were 2,112 people residing in Ballyshannon. Ballybofey had 802 persons while nearby Stranorlar, with 448 residents, also boosted the number of people in that area.<sup>202</sup> In October 1925 the Aodh Ruadh GAA club denied authorising a notice in a local newspaper which warned off soccer and rugby players from using their pitch in Ballyshannon but at the same time claimed that ‘none but members of the GAA are allowed

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<sup>199</sup> *DP and TN*, 7 Feb. 1931.

<sup>200</sup> Donegal GAA Archives, Letter from J. Hourihane to Seán Ó Caiside, 3 April 1933. GAA 1/4/1 (2) 1.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter from A. Delap to Seán Ó Caiside, 27 Dec. 1933. GAA 1/4/1 (10) (11)

<sup>202</sup> *Thom’s Directory of Ireland for the Year 1931*, p.1014.

to practice in the park.’<sup>203</sup> This club had the backing of the local *Donegal Democrat* while the South Donegal soccer league, staged the following year, received virtually no coverage in this newspaper and a small number of matches were harshly criticised in the *Derry People* and *Donegal News*.<sup>204</sup> A friendly between Donegal Celtic and Erne FC in February was described as ‘a feeble attempt to revive the alien game in our midst.’<sup>205</sup> The former club’s matches were said to be poorly attended and at times the theory that soccer was a more scientific sport was ridiculed with references to injuries on the playing field.<sup>206</sup> This tactic was also used after a match in Ballybofey in 1928 in which a player had suffered a fractured leg.<sup>207</sup> This was said to disprove ‘the contention that soccer is a scientific game.’<sup>208</sup> Certain newspapers also attempted to prove that it was violent and uncivilized. Headlines such as ‘Wild scenes at soccer game’ were undoubtedly an attempt to circulate this notion.<sup>209</sup>

This criticism was not unique to Donegal and appears to have been a national pattern, being encouraged by the GAA both locally and nationally. In 1912 the *Gaelic Athlete* claimed that foul play was frequent in soccer while professionalism was also condemned.<sup>210</sup> Soccer in Connacht was targeted in 1913 with a preview of a manufactured fixture, which implied that a game between ‘United and Athletic’ in County Mayo was purely organized for money making purposes.<sup>211</sup> Less than six months into the Great War the newspaper gleefully announced that ‘soccer football in Great Britain and Ireland seems to be going to pieces’ while Armagh was said to have been ‘added to the long list of towns in the “Black north” where soccer is dead, never to be resurrected’ the following year.<sup>212</sup> As Tadhg Ó hAnnrachain

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<sup>203</sup> *DD*, 23 Oct. 1925.

<sup>204</sup> See for example, *DP and TN*, 23 Feb. 1926.

<sup>205</sup> *DP and TN*, 23 Feb. 1926.

<sup>206</sup> See for example, *DP and TN*, 13 March, 3 July and 14 Aug. 1926.

<sup>207</sup> *DJ*, 13 Aug. 1928.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>209</sup> *DP and TN*, 26 July 1930.

<sup>210</sup> *GA*, 3 Feb. 1912.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 Mar. 1913.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 Jan. 1915 and 4 Mar. 1916.

has stated, 'soccer was not only associated in the eyes of many GAA observers with the British army and the British economic system, but its marriage of professionalism and sport was cordially despised.'<sup>213</sup>

References to the playing of soccer in Bundoran by Free State soldiers in one paper in April 1926 were denied by a *Donegal Democrat* writer who claimed that 'there has not been a game of soccer played in Bundoran for the past twenty years' while the *Gaelic Athlete* claimed that Bundoran United was 'in reality a few soldiers from Finner Camp, not a Bundoran footballer being among the number.'<sup>214</sup> While Gaelic games were portrayed as being Irish, attempts to tie soccer with the British military were not uncommon. In May 1926 an effort to undermine the constitution of the local soccer league was made by Ulster GAA Council delegate J.J. Woods who stated that in Donegal, soccer 'was being played by ex-soldiers and Republicans and Specials from across the Border who did not support their game.'<sup>215</sup> This tone continued with ex-army men blamed for organising soccer in the county in April 1930.<sup>216</sup> A county board delegate claimed in April 1932 that 'they had squashed the soccer in Donegal town' but the promotion of association football in Ballyshannon was said to have been 'promoted by an active branch of the British Legion.'<sup>217</sup>

Those employed by the government in the Letterkenny Mental Hospital who stuck to soccer were criticised in the press in 1927 and a number of GAA writers advocated the philosophy that they had a duty to play Gaelic games because of this.<sup>218</sup> County board chairman Seán Ó Caiside stated in 1928 that customs officials in Lifford were not doing enough to promote the GAA there and that 'these people should be asked to do their duty

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<sup>213</sup>Tadhg Ó hAnnrachain, 'The Heroic Importance of Sport: The GAA in the 1930s' in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 25, no. 10 (2008), pp 1326-1337, p.1332.

<sup>214</sup>*DD*, 16 April 1926 and *GA*, 27 Feb. 1926.

<sup>215</sup>*DV*, 15 May 1926.

<sup>216</sup>*DJ*, 9 April 1930.

<sup>217</sup>*DP and TN*, 16 April 1932.

<sup>218</sup>*Ibid.*, 12 Feb. 1927.

towards the national games.<sup>219</sup> Cross-over of players, and sometimes officials, was quite common in the Letterkenny area, and this also led to public criticism. In July of 1927, Letterkenny GAA delegate Eunan Coyle, the secretary of the Donegal County Board, resigned his post having become disillusioned with the lack of GAA activity at that time.<sup>220</sup> Apparently he became the secretary of the newly formed Letterkenny Rovers FC and a number of GAA players who joined him were also condemned.<sup>221</sup> A failure to succeed at Gaelic football was given as a reason for the defection of players at this time.

Crossover of players had been a problem in Ballybofey in 1923 and in 1927 it was claimed in the *Derry People and Tírconnaill News* that the local GAA club's failure to field against Letterkenny Rovers was 'all the more unreasonable in view of the fact that a soccer team from that town travelled to Letterkenny and played a game in the Mental Hospital grounds.'<sup>222</sup> This conflict came to a head in 1928 with the local soccer club's efforts to raise the profile of the game there. The Ballybofey Wanderers AFC, in their participation in the Lifford and District League, organisation of exhibition matches and a five a-side competition, heightened fears amongst GAA organisers that soccer was becoming too popular in their area. A match between Sligo and Derry soccer selections had been held in Ballybofey on 3 June with a parade to the field held beforehand.<sup>223</sup> Plans for a cup competition for all teams in the north-west were unveiled at a later meeting of the local soccer club and the hosting of a juvenile league was also discussed, while it was revealed that gate receipts from the above fixture were 'a record gate for any match played at Ballybofey.'<sup>224</sup>

The Sarsfields GFC of Stranorlar attempted to counter this progress in June by declaring that they 'were determined to make every effort to induce the youth of the locality

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<sup>219</sup>*DJ*, 17 Feb. 1928.

<sup>220</sup>*Ibid.*, 15 July 1927.

<sup>221</sup>*Ibid.*, 30 Sept. and 24 Oct. 1927.

<sup>222</sup>*DD*, 13 July 1923 and *DP and TN*, 5 Feb. 1927.

<sup>223</sup>*DJ*, 4 June 1928.

<sup>224</sup>*Ibid.*, 18 June 1928.

to play the native games and resist the soccer invasion.’<sup>225</sup> Action was taken a few weeks later when they began a seven a-side juvenile league.<sup>226</sup> The St Vincent De Paul Charity Cup was also organised under Gaelic football rules by the local Erin’s Hope GAA club in November of that year.<sup>227</sup> This organisation of cups was advocated at meetings of the Ulster Council and at those of the Donegal county board. A Cavan delegate to the former organisation recommended ‘league fixtures in the summer, so as to keep the players from going to soccer’ in Donegal in 1924.<sup>228</sup> The secretary, P. McFadden, felt that medals should be given ‘in order to hold the teams together and give encouragement’ as this had been a successful enterprise in Tyrone.<sup>229</sup> Permission was given by McFadden, the chairman of the Ulster Council in October 1925, for the formation of town leagues in Armagh, Monaghan, and Donegal. This, it was felt, would cater for the wants of people who might be on the lookout for sport of another kind.’<sup>230</sup> J.J. Woods felt the collecting of medals for the Democrat Cup in May 1926 was necessary as competitive soccer was again being organised in his area at the time.<sup>231</sup>

Anger was aroused within Donegal GAA circles by a report on the growing popularity of the association code and the advertisement of another representative exhibition match, between County Donegal and Sligo selections scheduled for 12 August 1928, in Ballybofey.<sup>232</sup> Soccer organisers advertised their match with the rather provocative request to patrons to ‘come and see football as it should be played.’<sup>233</sup> The GAA attempted to counter the organisation of the exhibition match by arranging a challenge Gaelic football match, also in Ballybofey, between that year’s two county finalists, for the same day and scheduled to

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<sup>225</sup>*DJ*, 20 June 1928.

<sup>226</sup>*Ibid.*, 27 July 1928.

<sup>227</sup>*Ibid.*, 9 Nov. 1928.

<sup>228</sup>*DP and DN*, 5 Jan. 1924.

<sup>229</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>230</sup>*DP and TN*, 4 Oct. 1925.

<sup>231</sup>*DD*, 15 May 1926.

<sup>232</sup>*DJ*, 27 July and 1 Aug. 1928.

<sup>233</sup>*Ibid.*, 6 Aug. 1928.

begin at the same time.<sup>234</sup> This was clearly arranged after the soccer plans were announced with the excuse given that the Ardara team had been too busy to take up the offer of a challenge match against Killygordon until then.<sup>235</sup>

The day passed without any major standoff. Both games, ‘played in close proximity to each other and started simultaneously’ were run off peacefully and despite supporters carrying banners and accompanied by bands, meeting on the way to the game, ‘beyond some cheering and shouting, there were no untoward incidents.’<sup>236</sup> According to the *Derry Journal*’s reporter present, the soccer match was attended by approximately 1,500 spectators while the Gaelic football fixture was watched by an estimated 500 supporters.<sup>237</sup> Both games certainly received much publicity and while instances of clashes in fixtures appear to be scarce in other areas in the county, in 1931 the Milford GAA club complained in the press that ‘another game was arranged’, with free admission, as a ‘counter attraction’ to one of their matches in May of that year.<sup>238</sup> Naturally, this criticism of rival codes was not one sided, with some newspapers such as *Football Sports Weekly* drawing comparisons of soccer’s progress at the expense of GAA in areas such as Drogheda in 1927.<sup>239</sup>

Given the difficulty in mustering enough enthusiasm to form and maintain clubs, the planning of exhibition and important matches was thought to be a way of encouraging Gaelic games at the expense of soccer, although these were not organised frequently enough to have any major impact. One Falcarragh man claimed in May 1929 that in his district there were ‘about 20 soccer clubs...with the result that they were up against big odds’ and requested the

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<sup>234</sup>*DJ*, 12 Aug. 1928.

<sup>235</sup>*Ibid.*, 10 Aug. 1928.

<sup>236</sup>*Ibid.*, 13 Aug. 1928.

<sup>237</sup>*Ibid.*, 13 Aug. and 17 Aug. 1928.

<sup>238</sup>*DP and TN*, 30 May 1931.

<sup>239</sup>*Football Sports Weekly* (Hereafter referred to as *FSW*), 5 Feb. 1927. I am grateful to David Toms for drawing my attention to this newspaper.

county board organise a challenge match so as to assist them in re-establishing a club there.<sup>240</sup> This request was granted and the match took place ‘before a magnificent crowd’ the following month and the club was subsequently reformed but appears to have been an exception in this regard that year.<sup>241</sup> By 1931 soccer was again being given priority there which illustrates the difficulty in transition experienced in some areas.<sup>242</sup> Other members hoped to see important competitive matches held in their areas to assist the promotion of Gaelic games. A request by Sergeant M.J. Cullen to Seán Ó Caiside in October 1933 that the Minor Gaelic football county final be held in Churchill along with a challenge match on the same day to attract further interest was unsuccessful.<sup>243</sup> This general failure to hold exhibition matches characterised the GAA in Donegal for much of the period in this chapter, and the handful of attempts noted illustrates this.

A second clash of fixtures in Ballybofey did not receive as much press coverage as the first and the conflict appears to have lessened after this as no notices of any other matches being staged simultaneously in Ballybofey were recorded in the press.<sup>244</sup> In reply to a letter from ‘Uadharan’ who stated that ‘while the GAA would further in its way as far as it can that individualism which we term nationality, the other [soccer organisers] would crush out nationality, restore the foreign connexion (sic) and set up the British as master again’, Ballybofey AFC were strongly defended in the press by secretary Henry McGowan.<sup>245</sup> He claimed that, unlike himself, no county board members had been involved in Ireland’s fight for independence. He declared his distaste for the recent abuse and stated that ‘we, who are

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<sup>240</sup>*DD*, 25 May 1929.

<sup>241</sup>*DJ*, 24 June 1929.

<sup>242</sup>*DPP*, 18 July 1931.

<sup>243</sup>Donegal GAA Archives, Letter from Sergeant Cullen to Seán Ó Caiside, 4 Oct. 1933GAA/1/4/1 (8) (2) and *DP and TN*, 2 Dec. 1933.

<sup>244</sup>*DJ*, 28 Sept. 1928.

<sup>245</sup>*Ibid.*, This letter listed a county selection to play Killygordon in the second counter fixture although whether it was written by those within the county board is not clear. The writer also stated that ‘we claim and have the right to get the support of the whole county for our games.’ Although today it is spelt *Uachtaran*, meaning president, this word appears to have been written in old Irish in the 1928 letter.



carrying on the Association football game here, do not want the British back, and have sense enough to know that Association football would be as useless a weapon in bringing them back as Gaelic football was in putting them away.’<sup>246</sup> The playing of soccer nationally had been defended in *Football Sports Weekly* and in particular in February of that year by Oscar Traynor, a TD who had been heavily involved in the struggle for Ireland’s independence. In an article under the heading ‘The crime of playing soccer’, he stated that ‘some of the highest executive officers of the Republican movement, from 1916 onwards, played the despised foreign games, and I never heard any of them apologising for doing so.’<sup>247</sup> As previously noted, Donegal county board administration by those involved in the War of Independence had declined as the decade wore on and clearly those organising the GAA in Donegal by 1928 relied more on rhetoric than any major previous military involvement of delegates. The end result was that despite the controversy, soccer, cricket and Gaelic football continued to be played in Ballybofey and problems with the illegal crossover of players to soccer there were still being noted by the Eastern GAA Board in 1934.<sup>248</sup>

Donegal was not unique in respect to this soccer-GAA conflict. At an Ulster Council meeting at the end of September 1928, one delegate applied for an inter-county match to ‘fight the soccer element’ to be held in Clones and wished to see a declaration that clubs would have nothing to do with soccer. Permission was given for this match to take place on 21 October, although no declaration appears to have been proclaimed.<sup>249</sup> Although the early years of the reorganized county board saw some GAA clubs organized in areas where soccer had previously been played, this lessened as the 1920s wore on. It must be stated that while GAA writers attempted to influence readers in their choice of sport, the actual effect of this is

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<sup>246</sup>*DJ*, 5 Oct. 1928.

<sup>247</sup>*FSW*, 11 Feb. 1928. Traynor, a Republican leader in the Civil War, had played in goal for Belfast Celtic during the 1911-12 and 1912-13 seasons. See also *Ibid.*, 2 April 1927. Belfast club Alton Celtic, who won the FAIFS Cup in 1923, were said to have been ‘practically all members’ of the Northern Division of the IRA.

<sup>248</sup>*DJ*, 20 July 1934.

<sup>249</sup>*DP and TN*, 29 Sept. 1928.

hard to establish, other than drawing attention to these matches. Many of those interested in soccer appeared to simply ignore the GAA's criticism and there was no widespread decline of clubs or loss of support as a result of the press campaign. Attempts continuously made by those in the GAA to counteract involvement in association football by their members using their own rules, such as the Ban, probably had a stronger effect on lessening interest in soccer, although attitudes towards its implementation varied and actions against offenders were marked by inconsistency.

The Donegal GAA County Board had set out its attitude to banned sports reasonably soon after its re-establishment. At a meeting in June 1919, clubs were warned that any involvement of members 'in sports programmes which include foreign games' would be punished with a six month suspension.<sup>250</sup> This was initially difficult to monitor and not always rigidly implemented. Red Hugh's of Killygordon protested that Bundoran's 1919 county final victory was illegal as the winning team contained a player 'who had played "association" within the past six months.'<sup>251</sup> This was not a successful appeal and it must have been almost impossible to field teams which did not contain soccer players around this time given low population rates in rural areas and the number of players available in the 18-35 age group.

Measures to monitor the involvement of GAA members in banned sports in Donegal do not appear to have been put in place until 1924 with the introduction of vigilance committees by the Central Council. The Donegal GAA county board voted to retain the Ban in March and at the end of the year they established their first vigilance committee, whose duty was said to be 'to report where foreign games are being played, and the attendance of

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<sup>250</sup> *DJ*, 18 June 1919.

<sup>251</sup> *DD*, 14 May 1920.

members of the GAA as players or spectators at such functions.’<sup>252</sup> Although this was of course supposed to be a covert organisation, a variance in decisions against offenders taken at county board meetings would suggest it was not consistently carried out in this decade. This was hindered by the fact that in 1925, not all clubs and county board delegates were in favour of retaining the Ban. A vote to decide whether or not to retain this rule at a Donegal county board meeting in March 1925 was only decided when county president Seán Ó Caiside voted in favour of keeping the rule.<sup>253</sup> In general, suspension of players in the period immediately after 1924 seems to have been infrequent at times and the fear of losing team members and an inconsistent monitoring of players’ other sporting activities appears to have been the reason for this.

The exact rules of the Ban were initially a source of confusion for clubs’ administrators and players, and indiscretions were sometimes brought to the public’s attention through the press. The inconsistent nature of the Ban was compounded by clubs, and county selectors, allowing soccer players to play despite uncertainty, and indeed knowledge of their soccer activities in some cases. At times these matters were only clarified by correspondence in the press. After the Donegal team was defeated by Derry in the Ulster Gaelic football championship in June 1923, one enraged correspondent exposed the fact that the Derry team contained a number of soccer players.<sup>254</sup> In particular, there seemed to be a lack of clarity over how long a player who took part in an association football match had to wait until he was deemed eligible to play Gaelic games although it appears that this was supposed to be a six month period. At the end of 1925 Cavan issued a protest against Donegal Gaelic football goalkeeper Bob Black who had appeared against them in a league match. Black later claimed, in an open letter to the press, that the secretary of the Aodh

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<sup>252</sup> *DD*, 28 March and 26 Dec. 1924.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 March 1925.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 June 1923.

Ruadh club had given him the all clear to play despite his attendance at a soccer match. The length of his suspension for this infringement was unclear to him.<sup>255</sup> Donegal were given the benefit of the doubt at an Ulster Council meeting in December when General O'Duffy stated that 'he presumed that Donegal at the last moment selected the player and had no time to go into his legality.'<sup>256</sup> They retained the points and Black was reinstated in February 1926 having given an undertaking he would not commit a similar offence and on the recommendation of the county board, whom, it seems, placed too high a value on his talents to omit him.<sup>257</sup>

Others accused alleged that they had been given the go ahead by those involved in GAA administration. In March 1929 accusations by 'Upright' in the local press that the Raphoe Gaelic football team which had defeated Dungloe in the semi-final of the Charity Cup had fielded a well known soccer player led to his suspension.<sup>258</sup> The player in question, Jim Harte, replied to 'Upright' and claimed that he had been given the all clear by his club and had 'ample proof' that he was registered.<sup>259</sup> Clearly the fact that players had participated in soccer was known to those attending matches. Reporters seemed well aware so it is highly likely that so too did clubs. It is also likely that this exposing of players was done to deter members from straying to other codes. GAA members' attendance at soccer matches was also noted in the press. In February 1929, one press correspondent claimed that 'there were many Gaelic games enthusiasts from Donegal in the throng' at the Rock Cup final in Derry city and that 'talk of a ban is all nonsense. There is no attempt to enforce it.'<sup>260</sup> Again this seems to have been a national trend, with the *Gaelic Athlete* particularly scathing about the failure of Vigilance committees in Dublin in 1925 to enforce the rules of the GAA and

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<sup>255</sup>*DD*, 1 Jan. 1926.

<sup>256</sup>*DP and TN*, 19 Dec. 1925.

<sup>257</sup>*Ibid.*, 23 Feb. 1926.

<sup>258</sup>*DJ*, 18 March 1929.

<sup>259</sup>*Ibid.*, 22 March 1929.

<sup>260</sup>*Ibid.*, 15 Feb. 1929.

stating that ‘unfortunately what was known here in Dublin was equally true in other places.’ The editor also claimed he would rather see ‘the GAA smashed in defence of an honest principle than see it existing as a fraud and farce.’<sup>261</sup>

More discreetly, letters were sometimes sent to the Donegal GAA county chairman informing him of offenders, but at times even the Donegal County Board were uncertain how to deal with these. In June 1933 county chairman Seán Ó Caiside received a letter reporting three Ardara GAA players who had attended a soccer match in Killybegs the day after they helped defeat Carrick Gaelic football team. A protest was entered by the Carrick club claiming the points as a result of the Ardara players’ indiscretion.<sup>262</sup> Clearly the chairman was unsure of what to do as it appears he wrote to the offices of the Leinster GAA seeking instruction and was later notified that Ardara should lose the points.<sup>263</sup> This seems to have been an exceptional case in Donegal GAA at this time but illustrates the problems of dealing with offenders. As can be seen, correspondence to the county board and newspaper reports provided accounts of players’ indiscretions in playing and attending so called foreign games, and therefore indirectly helped the administration of the GAA.

As the case of Bob Black demonstrates, GAA teams in Donegal simply could not afford to lose players and were willing to show leniency in dealing with them. This was not uncommon within Ulster GAA circles. In March 1917, a number of Derry players were reinstated to the GAA as although ‘none of them were the recognised period from soccer’ it was felt by the Ulster Council that this would help the GAA movement in Derry.<sup>264</sup> Tyrone GAA officials ‘handed in a long list for reinstatement including some who had already been

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<sup>261</sup>GA, 10 Oct. 1925.

<sup>262</sup> Donegal GAA Archives, Letter from Seán Ó Cinneide to Seán Ó Caiside, 19 June 1933. GAA /1/4/1 (4) (6). and letter from James Cunningham to Seán Ó Caiside 19 June 1933. GAA /1/4/1(4) (7).

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., Letter from Leinster GAA to Seán Ó Caiside, 28 June 1933. GAA /1/4/1 (4) (11).

<sup>264</sup>Ulster GAA Council Minutes, Vol.1, Annual Convention, 17 March 1917.

reinstated,' at an Ulster Council meeting in June 1924.<sup>265</sup> In 1927 there were applications from at least thirty-three Donegal footballers while in July 1928, the names of thirteen Donegal players seeking readmission were noted at an Ulster Council meeting.<sup>266</sup> Players were also sometimes pardoned locally without being brought to the Ulster Council's attention. In March 1926, Aodh Ruadh GAA club readmitted players who were supposed to have played soccer having decided there was not enough evidence to suspend them.<sup>267</sup> This approach did not always prove successful. A number of St Eunan's Gaelic football players who had switched to the local soccer club in the late 1920s were pardoned and readmitted by the county board 'on the strength of undertakings regarding their future conduct.'<sup>268</sup> This was not sufficient to deter them, however. One writer noted that 'for a while there was constancy to the old standards, but eventually the soccer craze again overwhelmed a considerable portion of players.'<sup>269</sup> Attitudes towards soccer amongst GAA members varied in Letterkenny for much of the 1920s and into the next decade. The Letterkenny GAA club proposed the removal of the Ban in 1927 and 1928.<sup>270</sup> GAA clubs in Letterkenny at times certainly advocated a policy of leniency towards the playing of soccer and the Ban was a source of frustration to many of their members, who often chose to play soccer instead. Teams were severely weakened because of suspensions in March 1932 and July 1934.<sup>271</sup> By 1934 there was no significant shift in favour of the Ban within the St Eunan's GAA club and some members made an attempt to have it removed completely.<sup>272</sup> Generally the idea did not

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<sup>265</sup>Ulster GAA Council Minutes, Vol.1, Ulster Council Meeting, 4 June 1924.

<sup>266</sup>Ulster GAA Council Minutes, Vol.2, Ulster Council Meeting, 14 July 1928.

<sup>267</sup>*DD*, 12 March 1926.

<sup>268</sup>*DJ*, 20 Sept. 1929.

<sup>269</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>270</sup>*Ibid.*, 7 Jan. 1927 and 28 Jan. 1928.

<sup>271</sup>*DP and TN*, 5 March 1932 and *DJ*, 1 Aug. 1934. In July 1934, St Eunan's could only name six regulars in their senior team and had to field nine minor players.

<sup>272</sup>*DJ*, 7 Dec. 1934.

receive enough support at the highest levels of GAA administration, either in Donegal or nationally, at this time.<sup>273</sup>

Some offending GAA members were punished more severely than others. At a meeting of the county board in June 1931, a Ballyshannon player was given the all clear after he had satisfactorily explained his attendance at a ‘banned game.’ Other players did not get off so lightly, as ‘a number of players from the Letterkenny and Ballybofey district’ were ‘suspended for the full period.’ This also suggests that the GAA were keen to keep those they knew would be loyal to them while getting rid of those who would probably return to soccer. It is also clear that not every area had a vigilance committee in operation at this time.<sup>274</sup> ‘Gael’ claimed in July 1931 that ‘officers might be more active in certain districts’ as ‘in some districts players are being allowed to attend and in some cases, even to take part in foreign games.’<sup>275</sup> The appointing of ‘vigilance men’ seems to have still been poorly organised in the early 1930s judging by the number of requests to the chairman in 1933, Seán Ó Caiside, to sanction delegates for this type of work at short notice.<sup>276</sup>

In January 1934, Eastern board delegate Leo McCarron called for a stricter policy to be shown in that division in regard to sanctioning of officers and for only ‘good, genuine, vigilance men be appointed.’<sup>277</sup> Opinions clearly varied in that area. A plea for leniency was called for at an eastern board meeting in July 1934 as a number of delegates felt that some offending players were only ‘pauns’ (sic) in ‘a sinister move to try and destroy Gaelic football.’<sup>278</sup> It was the view of the secretary Patrick O’Donnell that ‘this rule should be

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<sup>273</sup>*DJ*, 21 Jan. 1935.

<sup>274</sup>See *DV*, 27 June 1931 and *DD*, 27 June 1931.

<sup>275</sup>*DP and TN*, 25 July 1931.

<sup>276</sup>See for example, Donegal GAA Archives, Letter from J. Hourihan to Seán Ó Caiside, 3 April 1933 GAA /1/4/1 (2) (1) and letter from Brother Lucien to Seán Ó Caiside, 13 April 1933. GAA/1/4/1 (2) (5).

<sup>277</sup>*DP and TN*, 27 Jan. 1934.

<sup>278</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 Aug. 1934.

drastically dealt with.’<sup>279</sup> One Eastern board delegate also stated that ‘vigilance men were far too strict’ and ‘they should exercise discretion, and a little intelligence and common sense in carrying out their duties.’<sup>280</sup> Eventually the matter was adjourned with the chairman given authority to take whatever action he felt was necessary.

This inconsistency was not unique to Donegal. Opinions were divided on dealing with players in Monaghan in 1925 with a Mr Murphy of Clones and General O’Duffy rejecting an attempt to have fifteen soccer players reinstated after they had given their word to stick to Gaelic games.<sup>281</sup> A Louth County Board delegate claimed in August 1927 that ‘most of those who were clamouring for the suspension of soccer players were regular attendants at Association football.’<sup>282</sup> Strong action was, however, sometimes taken against players in order to set an example to other clubs. A number of Rapparees and Ardee players were suspended in 1927 for their involvement in soccer by the Louth County Board at this time as the secretary stated that ‘they would have to make a start somewhere’ in their actions against players involvement in banned codes.<sup>283</sup> This illustrates the difficulty in adhering to the Ban when many GAA members were clearly interested in maintaining their support for other codes and activities banned by the GAA.

## **Conclusion**

A key finding in this chapter is that nationalism was less of a factor in the decision to take up Gaelic football, rather than continue with soccer in Donegal, than has previously been assumed on the basis of national studies. Of critical importance in the spread of sport in Donegal was the ability to organise competitive structures and publicise these in the local press. The impact of physical geography and cultural boundaries on the development of sport

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<sup>279</sup>*DP and TN*, 3 Aug. 1934.

<sup>280</sup>*Ibid.*, 4 Aug. 1934.

<sup>281</sup>*DJ*, 7 Nov. 1925.

<sup>282</sup>*Ibid.*, 26 Aug. 1927.

<sup>283</sup>*Ibid.*,



has also been illustrated. Outside influences were fundamental to the choice of codes in the north-east while tradition also played a part in the decision to continue with association football. While transfer of personnel and parish identity were key factors in the decision to adhere to Gaelic football, there were clear geographical boundaries which the GAA were unable to penetrate and soccer showed a resilience in these regions which illustrates the importance of how, in many cases, the development of sport is affected by which sport is first initiated into society. The fluidity of sporting choice must also be noted and in a number of areas, both codes were played. This was particularly notable in the east of the county where population rates were higher in towns such as Letterkenny and Ballybofey than in more rural villages such as Ardara. The lack of sporting unity and the significance of individual organisers on the development of sport has again been highlighted, as, in the case of soccer, Donegal continued to be ignored by central administrative agencies. Soccer in Donegal was generally organised by those involved in the industrial sector while the majority of players were also categorised as coming from this class.

As Ó hAnnrachain has stated, ‘the premises on which the leadership of the GAA trumpeted the cultural significance of sport in general and Gaelic games in particular were deeply flawed and imbued with many of the same notions that helped to vitiate contemporary governmental attempts at linguistic and cultural revival.’<sup>284</sup> While this chapter has shown how rivalry between sporting organisers can be exacerbated in the press, the GAA in Donegal failed in its attempt to turn public opinion against soccer by portraying it as a ‘foreign’ game and measures to counteract the playing of this code were generally unsuccessful. Methods of dealing with offending players were marked with inconsistency while efforts to organise Gaelic football exhibitions in areas where this code was weak did not receive sufficient attention by the county board. The GAA relied more on rhetoric, generally expressed through

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<sup>284</sup> Ó hAnnrachain, ‘The Heroic Importance of Sport’, p.1336.

the press, than on actual physical efforts to counteract soccer. Liam O'Callaghan has illustrated in his study of Munster rugby that 'the Ban mentality was a contested concept' and overlaps between rugby and Gaelic football were evident.<sup>285</sup> Opinions on the Ban clearly varied in Donegal where a tradition of soccer, low population rates and the threat of emigration meant that many teams could not afford to lose players, no matter what their sporting preferences were.

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<sup>285</sup>Liam O'Callaghan, *Rugby in Munster: A Social and Cultural History* (Cork, 2011), p.177.

## Chapter 6: The Social Background of the GAA

### Introduction

This chapter will look at the impact of the GAA on society in Donegal through five distinct sections. It will focus on the three periods in the GAA's development in Donegal in which the most activity took place, 1888-92, 1905-7 and 1919-34. Section I examines the origins of clubs and will show that while Donegal's early GAA clubs were founded primarily for recreational and social purposes, many of those organised in the early 1900s differed in that they, as part of the era of cultural nationalism, were clearly representative of political aims and were initially actively involved in a more militant form of nationalism. Nationalist fervour was also behind the organisation of a number of clubs in 1919 and some clubs were spread through contagious diffusion. In section II, the social activities of Donegal's clubs will be addressed. Early club activities appear to have been rather basic in that as well as playing, they met only to discuss club matters and to enjoy post-match refreshments. A number of Donegal's 1905-7 clubs were more concerned with attending nationalist rallies and parades while GAA clubs in Donegal in the 1919 to 1934 period were generally too involved in the day to day running of Gaelic games and trying to make ends meet to give any serious thought to other traditional Irish ideals.

Players and administrators are discussed in section III. An analysis of players from both the 1888-92 and 1905-7 periods has shown that the majority were aged between twenty-one to twenty-five years old and came from an agricultural background, were Roman Catholic and single. This correlates with both Hunt and McElligott's work on Westmeath and Kerry respectively.<sup>1</sup> While the background of administrators in the 1905-7 period in Donegal

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Hunt, 'The GAA: Social Structure and Associated Clubs' in Mike Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse, *The Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884-2009* (Dublin, 2009), pp 183-202 and Richard McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom: The Establishment and Development of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Kerry, 1884-1924', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University College Dublin, 2011, pp 119-29.

was mainly professional, this differs from McElligott's findings in Kerry where the majority of these came from the commercial sector.<sup>2</sup> Similarly a comparison of the socio-occupational backgrounds of GAA and soccer players and organisers in Donegal will be given and it will be shown that while the majority of GAA players were employed in the agricultural sector, most of the soccer players assessed were involved in industrial work. The socio-occupational backgrounds of organisers of these codes were also found to be different. An examination of the religious backgrounds of these men is also offered in order to establish the role of religion in the organisation of soccer teams and competitions and to clarify the extent to which religious denomination played in the development of soccer and Gaelic games throughout Donegal. As will be seen, while Gaelic games were primarily played and organised by Roman Catholics, soccer attracted support from players and administrators from a variety of religious denominations found within the county, although significantly, unlike in areas such as East Ulster, there were no clear religious distinctions between soccer clubs.

Section IV focuses on patrons and illustrates that the early GAA in Donegal did not attract much interest outside clubs' localities and the level of patronage was low in comparison with cricket and soccer clubs at the time. This improved with the support of the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church in 1905 but with the decline of the county board in 1907 involvement of these men similarly deteriorated. In the 1920s clubs still depended on the goodwill of local landowners for playing fields while financial assistance was crucial for the survival of clubs. Monitoring of entrances was still a problem and clubs relied on fundraising events such as concerts, ceilís, whist drives and annual sports to make ends meet. The successful role of the GAA club in parish life can be seen in the example of Aodh Ruadh of Ballyshannon although this was not always replicated in other areas. It was not until the

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<sup>2</sup> McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom', p.126.

1930s that the financial situation of the county board became more manageable but in some areas such as East Donegal, support was still not particularly forthcoming.

Section V looks at the role of spectators in the GAA in Donegal. While the 1905-7 competitions saw a change in the range of support given with an increase in the spread of GAA clubs, it was not until the 1920s that improvements in transport meant that supporters could travel further afield to inter-county matches. Upcoming fixtures received sensationalist previews in some sectors of the local press and the latter years of the 1920s saw an increase in attendances. These changes meant that Gaelic games became a more enticing prospect for the people of Donegal than they had done initially and in giving them something to look forward to, helped to cement the GAA's position within Donegal society.

## **I: The origins of GAA clubs**

### **1888-92**

Tom Hunt has noted a variety of factors in the founding of early GAA clubs. These included the coming together of those involved in farming, industry, education and the retail trade to form GAA branches. Members of pre-existing sports clubs' such as soccer also contributed to the formation of GAA clubs.<sup>3</sup> There is less evidence for this in Donegal although given the rural nature of a number of clubs it is not unlikely that members were drawn from farming networks. Two of the first Donegal clubs were formed after visits from Derry GAA branches in the late 1880s. Burt Hibernians were the first GAA club to be formed in the county, with the help of St Patrick's GAA club of Derry on 5 February 1888.<sup>4</sup> This club also helped to set up the Derry clubs Emeralds and John Mitchel's in September 1888.<sup>5</sup>

The initial staging of a friendly match and close cooperation were the methods by which the

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<sup>3</sup>Tom Hunt, 'Parish Factions, Parading Bands and Sumptuous Repasts: The Diverse Origins and Activities of Early GAA Clubs' in Dónal McAnallen, David Hassan and Roddy Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA: Ulaidh, Éire agus Eile* (Armagh, 2009), pp 86-99.

<sup>4</sup>See *DJ*, 8 Feb. 1888 and Donal Campbell, Damian Dowds and Damian Mullan, *Against the Grain: A History of Burt, its People and the GAA* (Burt, 2000), p.77.

<sup>5</sup>*DJ*, 15 Sept. and 17 Sept. 1888.

Cahir O's GAA club in Buncrana was formed on Sunday 18 November 1888 with the help of Derry GAA club St Columb's who played an exhibition match there.<sup>6</sup> The origins of the other Donegal GAA clubs at this time are more difficult to establish. There is little evidence that Portlough Harps or Killea Hibernians were participating in any type of GAA activities before November 1889. When they were both formed is unclear but by November, Killea Hibernians were affiliated to the Derry county committee, while Portlough Harps joined this organisation the following month.<sup>7</sup> Those wishing to participate in Gaelic games in North-east Donegal benefited from encouragement of those in the GAA in Derry in a way that soccer clubs in the area were also encouraged to participate in the North-west Football Association in the city in the early 1890s. By January of 1890 another Donegal club was up and running. Newtowncunningham Harps made contact with Derry club McCarthy's and hosted this club for Gaelic football and hurling matches that month.<sup>8</sup> In April 1890 Buncrana Emmets were welcomed into the Derry GAA.<sup>9</sup> This evidence suggests a higher number of clubs in existence in Donegal that year than the figure of three noted by De Burca, although not all may have been registered with the GAA. While the development of the GAA in Ulster was generally slow at this time in comparison with nationwide trends, Donegal's number of six clubs was still almost at the bottom of the national table with only Tyrone having a lower number which illustrates the lack of development of the Association in these counties.<sup>10</sup> Tyrone's lack of development may have hindered the spread of the GAA in the bordering east Donegal area. Donegal's six other GAA teams active in the 1888-92 period received scarce coverage in the press and their foundation details are unclear.

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<sup>6</sup>*DJ*, 19 Nov. 1888.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 18 Nov. 1889 and 16 Dec. 1889.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 31 Jan. 1890.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 4 April 1890.

<sup>10</sup> Marcus De Burca, *The GAA: A History* [Second edition] (Dublin, 2000), pp 41-2. Cavan had the most clubs in Ulster with thirty-seven out of Ulster's total of eighty-eight with the initial national figure recorded that year lying at 875.

Donegal's first GAA teams were keen to show a strong national allegiance through their names and colours worn. The fact that two clubs were named Hibernians while three others were named Harps is evidence that these organisations were keen to display their Irish identity without national or political identities, not unlike a number of those in Westmeath around this time.<sup>11</sup> The names of Buncrana's GAA clubs differed in that their founders chose to honour deceased Irish leaders. The Cahir O's club was named after Sir Cahir O'Doherty and the town's other club, Buncrana Emmets, took their name in memory of Robert Emmet.<sup>12</sup> The choosing of patriotic colours was also evident in their kit. Green and yellow were the colours chosen by Killea Hibernians at the 1889 Christmas tournament in Derry while Portlough took to the field in green and red.<sup>13</sup> This wearing of green illustrates an expression of these clubs' nationalist identity, a practice not uncommon amongst other GAA clubs at the time.<sup>14</sup> Burt Hibernians wore orange and green in their Derry hurling championship victory over St Columb's (green and white) in January 1889 and a brief examination of some other Derry clubs also suggest an eagerness to display their political allegiances. Clubs such as St Patrick's, Hibernians, Emeralds, John Mitchel's and William O'Brien's all featured in 1890 and as Mike Cronin has noted, this political naming of GAA clubs at the time in other counties such as Meath highlights their desire to build 'an identity which stresses and publicises their links as sportsmen to the nationalist mission, the embrace of things Irish and the rejection of West Britonism.'<sup>15</sup> Dublin's early GAA clubs, of which there were 114 by 1888, generally took their names from 'either individuals or incidents in Irish history.'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Tom Hunt, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath* (Cork, 2007), p.160.

<sup>12</sup>Henry Boylan, *A Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Dublin, 1978), pp 100-1 and p.258. O'Doherty, Lord of Inishowen, was killed by Crown forces on 5 July 1608 having sacked and burned Derry city and Emmet was the leader of a Rising against the British government in 1803 and was later hanged for treason.

<sup>13</sup>*DJ*, 30 Dec. 1889.

<sup>14</sup>Neal Garnham, *Association Football and Society in Pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004), pp 134-5.

<sup>15</sup>Crime Department Special Branch Report on the GAA in the Northern Division-progress made during the year ended 31 Dec. 1890, 10 Feb. 1891. 2701/S and Mike Cronin, 'Enshrined in Blood: the Naming of Gaelic Athletic Association Clubs and the English Influence on Irish Sport' in *The Sports Historian*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1998) pp 90-104, p.96.

<sup>16</sup>William Nolan (ed.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin: Vol. 1 1884-1959* (Dublin, 2005), p. 22.

However there were some exceptions such as those called after sea locations and poetic names. The titles of the Donegal clubs lacked this diversity.

Despite this need to show their Irish identity, there is no evidence that any of these Donegal clubs were founded, or infiltrated by, the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Police reviews on the political allegiances of Donegal GAA clubs could be contradictory and inspectors' opinions varied and at times expressed a desire to err on the side of caution. Despite the completion of a report on the number of GAA clubs in the Northern Division in April 1890 by District Inspector W. Reeves which stated that there were three unnamed Donegal GAA clubs with sixty-three members and all under Fenian control, it is evident that the police force did not see these as a cause for any trouble.<sup>17</sup> Exactly how Reeves came to form this initial description is unclear. This is at loggerheads with a later report of the progress made by the GAA in the Northern division in February of 1891 which was completed by District Inspector A. Gambell. The political allegiances of the organisers of the clubs of Burt Hibernians, Cahir O's and Newtowncunningham Harps were clearly established. Gambell stated that 'as far as we know the leaders are not secret society men: but some of the members may belong to the AOH.'<sup>18</sup> Tom Garvin has stated that the Ancient Order of Hibernians, 'although the lineal successor to the Ribbon tradition in the north of Ireland, was...careful to deny any connection with the more illegal activities of its predecessors' and was opposed to the ideologies of the IRB.<sup>19</sup> Gambell's account establishes that these three Donegal clubs were not involved in the IRB and that the IRB in Derry failed to infiltrate them. Given that there was little connection with the IRB, one must assume that the clubs, while eager to display their nationalism through naming policies and colours worn,

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<sup>17</sup>Crime Department Special Branch GAA: Approximate Strength Under Clerical and Fenian Control, by Divisions. 5 May 1890.296/S.

<sup>18</sup>Crime Department Special Branch Report on the GAA in the Northern Division: Progress Made During the Year Ended 31 Dec. 1890. 10 Feb. 1891. 2701/S.

<sup>19</sup>Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* [Second edition] (Dublin, 2005), p.106.



were participating mainly for recreational reasons and in some areas such as Burt, a desire to carry on local traditions.

### **1905-7**

As can be seen in appendices 12 and 13, GAA clubs founded in 1905 were certainly of a more politicised nature than the nineteenth century clubs in Donegal which had been created primarily for recreational and social purposes. A major factor in the organisation of the GAA in Donegal in the early 1900s was the spread of cultural nationalism. The latter years of the 1890s saw a rise in political nationalism, which re-emerged with the Local Government of Ireland Act, the centenary of the 1798 Rebellion, the Boer War, the foundation of the United Irish League and increased voting opportunities.<sup>20</sup> By the beginning of the 1900s the rhetoric of journalists D.P. Moran and Arthur Griffith, who both advocated the rejection of West Britonism and encouraged the promotion of a more distinct Irish identity, was taking affect within Irish society.<sup>21</sup> Two cultural groups which were involved in the organisation of Gaelic games and the rejection of British culture in South Donegal in 1905 were the Gaelic League and Cumann na nGaedheal, although this interest was mainly generated by Seumus MacManus. The Gaelic League, founded in 1893 by Eoin MacNeill and Douglas Hyde, was ‘dedicated to the cultivation and revival of the Irish language and tradition’ although it was initially intended to be non-sectarian.<sup>22</sup> Tom Garvin has stated that it ‘never became a political society formally, nor did it ever become a mass organisation like the GAA or the post-1916 Sinn Féin.’<sup>23</sup> He has also stated that ‘it was essentially a movement of townspeople, often young and well educated.’ It expanded during the years of the Boer

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<sup>20</sup>Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.190.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p.191.

<sup>22</sup>Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, p.111 and p.113.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp 111-12.

War with membership trebling between 1898 and 1901 and the majority of its members appear to have been civil servants or professionals.<sup>24</sup>

The first Gaelic League branches in Donegal appear to have been formed in Barnesmore, Killybegs and Donegal by 1896 although the first meeting was held at Brockagh.<sup>25</sup> This movement was significant as a number of Gaelic League members were behind the formation of the first GAA county board in Donegal in 1905. The chief organiser of this board, Seumus MacManus, had been secretary of the Donegal town Gaelic League branch in 1896 and gained valuable administrative experience through his work in this body.<sup>26</sup> As Diarmaid Ferriter has stated, 'The Gaelic Athletic Association and in particular the Gaelic League were also important in drawing young people into the national movement, and political advancement and cultural enrichment seemed to necessitate membership of both organisations.'<sup>27</sup> On 19 September 1903 a new *Coiste Ceanntair* or district council of the Gaelic League was formed in Donegal town to go along with that in Inishowen and a number of those who were involved in the founding of the 1905 GAA county board were in attendance.<sup>28</sup> Seumus MacManus, the Reverend Edward Maguire and P.M. Gallagher were all heavily involved in both organisations.<sup>29</sup> By 1903, there were at least twelve Gaelic League branches in South Donegal but as will be seen later, the Gaelic League failed to have any major impact in Donegal and these branches did not carry enough strength within the county to organise a sufficient number of GAA clubs to challenge the domination of soccer at the time.<sup>30</sup> Of more importance to the organisation of GAA clubs in Donegal in 1905 was

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<sup>24</sup>Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, p. 112.

<sup>25</sup>Helen Meehan, *Inver Parish in History* (Mountcharles, 2005), p. 234 and pp 419-20 and 'The MacManus Brothers' in *Donegal Annual 1994* (Letterkenny, 1994) pp 5-18, p.7.

<sup>26</sup>Meehan, *Inver Parish in History*, p. 235. MacManus, born in 1868 in Mountcharles, and having become a national school teacher, was forced to resign his post as principal of Glencoagh NS in 1897 after expressing his nationalist views. He became a prominent author and lecturer.

<sup>27</sup>Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London, 2004), p.36.

<sup>28</sup>*DP and DN*, 26 Sept. 1903.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, and *DJ*, 25 Oct. 1905.

<sup>30</sup>*DP and DN*, 26 Sept. 1903.

Cumann na nGaedheal. According to Roy Foster, Cumann na nGaedheal ‘acted as a broad front forwarding cultural and economic nationalism, as well as feminism and pacifism.’<sup>31</sup>

Founded by Arthur Griffith in 1900, Diarmaid Ferriter believes that it soon became a front for the Irish Republican Brotherhood.<sup>32</sup>

The first GAA club founded in 1905 was the Lámh Dearg club in Mountcharles which grew out of Seamus MacManus’s branch of Cumann na nGaedheal. Significantly MacManus was at the forefront of the Mountcharles branch of Cumann na nGaedheal’s activities throughout 1905. Founded in February 1905 and named after MacManus’s deceased wife, Ethna Carberry, this group were the main advocates of the playing of Gaelic games in County Donegal that year.<sup>33</sup> Their Lámh Dearg GAA club was up and running in the spring and five clubs organised that year in the south of the county developed out of branches of this political organisation.<sup>34</sup> Four of these Cumann na nGaedheal clubs were in attendance at the Grand Camán Parade on 8 October 1905.<sup>35</sup> The Lámh Dearg club, Mountcharles was joined by the Ethna Carberry team, Croagh; the Naomh Conaill team, Kilraine; the Thomas Davis club, Dunkineely and the True Gaels of Meenabraddan.<sup>36</sup> They were met by other local camán clubs such as Ardaghey Old Celts, the Colmcille club, Lettermore, the John Mitchels club, Doorin, the Clann Conaill club, Brackey and the Four Masters club, Townawilly.<sup>37</sup> Both the Croagh and Dunkineely GAA clubs had been organised in May by local men Seamus McHugh (Dunkineely) and farmer John McGrath (Croagh) in conjunction with a visit to

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<sup>31</sup>Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (London, 1988), p.457

<sup>32</sup>Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, p.81.

<sup>33</sup>Meehan, *Inver Parish in History*, p.239. Anna Johnston’s pen-name was Ethna Carberry and she played a significant role in the Gaelic Revival in Belfast.

<sup>34</sup>*DJ*, 27 Feb. 1905.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 9 Oct. 1905.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*,

Bruckless Hall from Seumas MacManus and Patrick Healy who ‘addressed the boys upon the subject of the revival of the old games.’<sup>38</sup>

The Cumann na nGaedheal movement in the north of the county appears to have been weaker and there is no evidence that any GAA clubs were founded in this area because of that organisation.<sup>39</sup> Cumann na nGaedheal attracted little interest outside South Donegal and MacManus’ militant, anti-British approach was perhaps too radical for the majority of those in the county at this time. It was the Irish Parliamentary Party, which advocated a policy of Home Rule for Ireland, which received the support of Bishop O’Donnell and the majority of voters.<sup>40</sup> Irish Parliamentary Party candidates won all the seats in the Donegal constituencies in the 1906 election.<sup>41</sup> In any case, after the foundation of the county board, Cumann na nGaedheal rallies seem to have declined while MacManus’ preoccupation with a career in America by 1906 also impacted significantly on their organisation as well as on that of the GAA. Desmond Murphy has also stated that ‘the intense nationalism of the Bishop made it impossible to criticize the (Irish Parliamentary) Party without seeming to personally insult him.’<sup>42</sup> Nationally, it is difficult to establish the exact amount of Cumann na nGaedheal involvement in GAA clubs around this time although there is evidence that the Rathmines Hurling club, which was in operation in Dublin in 1902, had its origins in this political movement.<sup>43</sup> Clubs in Mountcharles, Meenabradden, Ardaghey, Burt, Newtowncunningham, Gweedore and Inch displayed their Irish allegiance by taking on titles associated with an Irish identification. Croagh and Dunkineely took on the names of deceased Irish national activists while Irish saints were remembered through the naming of clubs in Fahan, Churchill,

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<sup>38</sup>*DP and DN*, 20 May 1905.

<sup>39</sup>See, for example, Crime Branch Special, Inspector General and Chief Inspector’s Monthly Report, October 1905. 379/S. 4 Nov. 1905 and May 1906. 821/S. 4 June 1906. The RIC noted the presence of only four Cumann na nGaedheal clubs in October 1905 and they were said to be ‘mostly in the Ballyshannon district.’ By May 1906 this figure had not changed and these clubs were said to be ‘not very active.’

<sup>40</sup>Desmond Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster 1790-1921* (Derry, 1981), p.195.

<sup>41</sup>B.M. Walker (ed.), *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), pp 339-41.

<sup>42</sup>Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster*, p.195.

<sup>43</sup>Nolan (ed.) *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin: Vol. 1 1884-1959*, p.69.

Lettermore and Kilraine in their honour. The club names of those in Fintown, Donegal town, Letterkenny, Ballybofey and Brackey contained references to local clans, high kings and kingdoms. The patriotic naming of clubs after local or national figures was also common in Westmeath in the early twentieth century where Hunt believes that it illustrated the growth of nationalism and the politicisation of Gaelic football and hurling clubs.<sup>44</sup> This also seems to have been the case in Donegal.

Gaelic League branches were involved in the founding of GAA clubs in Longford, Westmeath, Dublin, Derry and Fermanagh at the beginning of the twentieth century and there is also evidence to suggest that a number of West Tyrone GAA clubs, founded prior to 1900, had their origins in the movement.<sup>45</sup> David Hassan also believes that the League 'assisted the promotion of Gaelic games through their inclusion in the *Feiseanna* or festival programmes.'<sup>46</sup> There is evidence to suggest that there was strong Gaelic League involvement in the camán clubs of Ballyshannon and Bundoran in 1904. A hurling club had been formed at a meeting of the Bundoran Gaelic League in April 1904 held under the presidency of Reverend J. Merron.<sup>47</sup> At the Ballyshannon hurling club ceilí (Irish dancing) held in May of that year, it was recorded that the Rock Hall was 'well filled, principally with members of the Ballyshannon, Bundoran and Belleek (Fermanagh) branches of the Gaelic League.'<sup>48</sup> However these GAA clubs were both temporarily in decline the following year without sufficient support and it appears that the former club's deterioration was due to the

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<sup>44</sup>Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.204.

<sup>45</sup>Tom Hunt, 'The GAA: Social Structure and Associated Clubs' in Mike Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse (eds.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884-2009* (Dublin, 2009) pp 200-1 and David Hassan, 'The GAA in Ulster' in Cronin, Murphy and Rouse (eds.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884-2009*, pp 77-91, p. 81.

<sup>46</sup>Hassan, 'The GAA in Ulster', p.81.

<sup>47</sup>*DV*, 22 April 1904.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 13 May 1904.

inactivity of that town's Gaelic League.<sup>49</sup> Decline and re-establishment of Gaelic League branches was a common occurrence at this time.<sup>50</sup>

While there is no doubt many GAA members were also involved in the Gaelic League, there is only minimal evidence that Gaelic League branches actually organised GAA teams during 1905. The Balldearg GAA club had been formed on 20 October at 'a largely attended meeting of the young men of Donegal (town).'<sup>51</sup> A Gaelic League branch was re-established in the town around this time and the GAA club was started in conjunction with this.<sup>52</sup> While all enrolled at the formation of Gweedore Old Celts in November 1905 were Irish speakers, it is unclear if there was any connection to this organisation. They did, however, state that their club 'promises to be the most Irish club in Co. Donegal, or perhaps all Ireland.'<sup>53</sup> A Glenfin team which played Glenswilly in March 1906 was said to have been started in connection with the local Gaelic league branch but failed to join the county board.<sup>54</sup> It appears that Gaelic League clubs were not of sufficient strength in the county to make any huge impact on the GAA at this time. One nationwide problem the Gaelic League experienced was that it was primarily urban based and never managed to gain sufficient interest in Irish speaking areas where it should have been more prominent.<sup>55</sup> In 1934 it was stated by Peadar McGinley, a man heavily involved in the Gaelic League in Donegal in the 1905-7 period that League organisers had fallen out with Bishop O'Donnell after they had declined to register the Féis Tír Chonaill as a Gaelic League function in 1906 in fear of non-Catholics being isolated. A disagreement over the necessity of a test in Irish for admittance to the National University was said to have worsened this relationship with the result that 'from

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<sup>49</sup>DV, 27 Oct. 1905.

<sup>50</sup>Timothy G. McMahon, *Grand Opportunity: The Gaelic Revival and Irish Society* (New York, 2008), pp 89-90.

<sup>51</sup>DJ, 27 Oct. 1905.

<sup>52</sup>DV, 27 Oct. 1905.

<sup>53</sup>DP and DN, 18 Nov. 1905.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 31 March 1906.

<sup>55</sup> Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998* (Oxford, 1999), p.180.

then on the League was not welcome in Tír Chonaill.<sup>56</sup> While this may be an oversimplification of the state of the Gaelic League in the county, certainly co-operation between this Association and GAA branches in Donegal was minimal during the years covered in this thesis, although there were some exceptions.

Members of other political organisations were eager to get involved in the GAA in the autumn of 1905. In Letterkenny, those present at the formation of the Lámh Dearg GAA club on 18 September included a number of members of the Irish National Federation and the United Irish League.<sup>57</sup> The Bundoran hurling club took on the name of Sinn Féin which suggests a strong loyalty to this movement while the GAA club in Creeslough was founded at a meeting of the village's Ancient Order of Hibernians branch.<sup>58</sup> The Glenfin club was also said to have been linked to this body but overall, the fact that only two Gaelic League clubs and one AOH branch formed GAA clubs in Donegal throughout 1905 and 1906 does not suggest any major involvement from these political branches.<sup>59</sup> Seumas MacManus's claim in September 1905 that the AOH in his own division had done 'remarkable work' in the development of the GAA, while criticising heavily the North-west branches of the AOH which he felt had done little to promote Gaelic games, was somewhat vague.<sup>60</sup> Some clubs such as Killygordon were evidently organised after contact from Seumas MacManus while others such as Ballybofey were helped by visiting clubs who initiated them in the rules through friendly matches.<sup>61</sup> There is no indication that any new clubs were formed in 1907 and this can be explained by the overall decline of GAA activity in the county that year.

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<sup>56</sup>*DD*, 28 July 1934. This was an Irish name for Donegal.

<sup>57</sup>*DJ*, 20 Sept. 1905.

<sup>58</sup>*DP and DN*, 14 Oct. 1905.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 Jan. 1906.

<sup>60</sup>*DP and DN*, 9 Sept. 1905.

<sup>61</sup>*DJ*, 12 Jan. 1906 and *DI*, 18 May 1906.

## 1919-34

Although these were the years in which the majority of Donegal's GAA clubs were formed it is more difficult to trace their origins than those formed in the 1905-7 period as only a few reports on clubs' founding meetings were published in the local press. Out of fifteen Donegal teams who appeared for Gaelic football purposes in 1919, only eight saw any competitive action. However it can be stated that a number of these were formed from a sense of patriotism. 1919-20 Gaelic football county champions, St Patrick's, Bundoran, was organised on 2 March 1919.<sup>62</sup> H.J. Kelly, who presided over the meeting, illustrated his nationalist views on why Gaelic games should be played and this type of ideology seems to have been the reason why many Donegal GAA clubs were formed around this time. Kelly had also presided at a Sinn Féin demonstration in Bundoran in January 1918 in which Edward Daly, future vice-chairman of the GAA club, had also participated.<sup>63</sup> No doubt there were other Bundoran GAA members involved in their local Sinn Féin club. The exact origins of the other GAA clubs which competed in the southern division of the county championship that year are difficult to establish although Aodh Ruadh, Ballyshannon, were in operation since 1909, having been founded through the local branch of the Gaelic League.<sup>64</sup>

Nationalist involvement initially boosted the development of clubs in the east of the county in the early years of the new county board. It is likely that two branches organised in 1919, Letterkenny and Castlefin, were organised by Sinn Féin members as Letterkenny GAA members John Curran and Michael Dawson were heavily involved in that political party while Castlefin GAA member and county board president Sam O'Flaherty was later elected as Sinn Féin representative to the Dáil. The naming of the Castlefin club as Con Colbert's suggests the presence of Sinn Féin men as a branch there bearing that name was in operation by 1916 and

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<sup>62</sup>*DI*, 8 March 1919.

<sup>63</sup>*DP and DN*, 19 Jan. 1918.

<sup>64</sup>*DJ*, 29 Oct. 1909.



O'Flaherty had recruited over twenty members as Volunteers the following year.<sup>65</sup> GAA clubs had appeared infrequently in Letterkenny throughout this decade with lack of regular opposition and competitions a major factor in this disruption. The 1919 club, which seems to have been named the Faugh a Ballaghs, may have simply been a continuation of those earlier organised.<sup>66</sup> Certainly the involvement of Curran and Dawson in these indicates this. Curran, as referee, was said to have been responsible for outlining the rules to the Killygordon Red Hugh's team before one of their first matches, a friendly against Letterkenny, around this time. The Killygordon club had apparently been formed by a group of former soccer players although the exact date of this is unclear, as is the amount of political involvement.<sup>67</sup>

William Murphy has noted that 'recent historians have recognised an important overlap between membership of the post-Rising party and the GAA' and cites the work of David Fitzpatrick on County Clare as an example of how they supported Sinn Féin activity in that county.<sup>68</sup> However, he also feels 'that the GAA maintained a recognisable distance between itself and Sinn Féin.'<sup>69</sup> Apart from the involvement of the aforementioned men, the organisation of GAA clubs in Donegal by Sinn Féin members seems inconsistent around the county. Desmond Murphy has noted a decline in enthusiasm for this political party in Donegal by 1919. This, he believes, was because 'many people, while privately sympathetic, had no wish to antagonise the economic or political patronage of the AOH.'<sup>70</sup> He also feels that 'the quality of leadership offered by Sinn Féin at local level was sporadic' and states that many branches were formed only because of the enthusiasm of individuals.<sup>71</sup> RIC reports do not suggest any major

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<sup>65</sup> Liam Ó Duibhir, *The Donegal Awakening: Donegal and the War of Independence* (Cork, 2009), p.57.

<sup>66</sup> See for example, *DJ*, 24 Feb. and 13 Sept. 1913, 24 Mar. 1915 and 5 April 1916, 29 Mar. 1919 and *DP and DN*, 8 Nov. 1913.

<sup>67</sup> 'Red Hugh's GAA Club/ CLG Aodh Rua, Cúil na gCúirrdín' Retrieved from [http://www.redhughsgaa.com/n\\_history.htm](http://www.redhughsgaa.com/n_history.htm) [Accessed 1 June 2011]

<sup>68</sup> William Murphy, 'The GAA During the Irish Revolution' in Mike Cronin, William Murphy and Paul Rouse (eds.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association 1884-2009* (Dublin, 2009), p.68.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>70</sup> Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster*, p.246.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

correlation between the number of Sinn Féin clubs and those of the GAA in Donegal by the autumn of 1919. In September they estimated that there were fifty-eight Sinn Féin clubs in the county with 5,488 members while noting the presence of only seven GAA clubs and 189 members.<sup>72</sup> While GAA activity would suggest that this number was fairly accurate with affiliated clubs recorded in Letterkenny, Castlefin, Killygordon, Drimarone, Donegal, Ballyshannon and Bundoran by the beginning of August, this number is quite low in comparison with branches and membership of Sinn Féin throughout the county.<sup>73</sup> References to Gaelic football at Sinn Féin sports are scarce although it was exhibited at the Frosses branch of Sinn Féin's sports in July 1918 and 'football', presumably Gaelic, was also played at Fanad Sinn Féin club's sports in June 1919.<sup>74</sup> These two references do not suggest any great attempt to promote the game throughout the county by other Sinn Féin clubs.

Contagious diffusion, and nationalist fervour, may well have been why a number of other eastern GAA clubs were formed, albeit later, in the aftermath of the War of Independence. In the winter of 1921-2 there were two clubs in Castlefin, while others were organised in Ballybofey, Stranorlar, Raphoe and Murlog and competed in a Tyrone and Tyrconnell Gaelic football league with seven Tyrone clubs lying in a similar location relatively near the Donegal-Tyrone border. There is also evidence that the O'Toole's club of Raphoe had a strong nationalist backing.<sup>75</sup> With the deterioration of this league in May 1922, the existence of the majority of these clubs unsurprisingly came to a halt.<sup>76</sup> Despite the presence of a team in Killybegs in the south-west in 1919, it was not until 1921 that the Glenties and Ardara clubs were up and running and it seems that these were also formed out of a sense of nationalist duty. By the winter of 1921 these three clubs were involved in league competition along with those in divisions in the west, south and

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<sup>72</sup>Crime Branch. Returns of Political Organisations in Donegal on 30 Sept. 1919, 1 Oct. 1919. CO904/110.

<sup>73</sup> See *DD*, 4 July 1919 and *DJ*, 29 Aug. 1919.

<sup>74</sup>*DP and DN*, 13 July 1918 and *DJ*, 23 June 1919.

<sup>75</sup>*DJ*, 3 March 1922.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 Jan., 17 March and 19 May 1922.

east of the county. Glenties and Ardara were organised in the months following the Truce on 11 July. The former came into existence on 24 July after a Gaelic football match was organised in the village and a week later they played Tyrone club Clady ‘so that local players could learn some of the finer points of the game.’<sup>77</sup> Ardara were formed on the 21 October in a local store with nationalist fervour given by local historians as the reason why both the Ardara and Glenties clubs came into existence.<sup>78</sup> The game appears to have been spread through challenge matches. At the end of that month they met and Glenties’ short experience of Gaelic football was probably a help to Ardara’s early development, while both teams also had former soccer players in their ranks.<sup>79</sup> There is some evidence to suggest Sinn Féin involvement in the early Ardara club. In an interview given in 1983, a member of the Ardara 1923 team, Charlie Gallagher, stated that nearly all of the players were members and ‘this is what drew them all together.’<sup>80</sup>

## **II: The Social Activities of GAA clubs**

### **1888-92**

Given their preoccupation with the perceived threat to security posed by the GAA, RIC reports unfortunately contained very little of the social aspects of the early Donegal GAA clubs. There is little evidence that, outside of a small number of areas, the GAA at this time was held in any great regard by the people of Donegal. Gaelic games in Donegal undoubtedly provided the opportunities for social interaction for a small minority of people but without any major celebrations within the community and these players do not appear to have gained the recognition of the county’s social, economic or political elites. Tom Hunt has stated that in the late nineteenth century, ‘many early GAA clubs and competitions provided

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<sup>77</sup> ‘History of Glenties GAA Club’ in *Donegal GAA Yearbook, 1978* (Ballyshannon, 1978), pp 23-4, p.24.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.23 and Seán MacConaill (ed.), *Idir Peil agus Pobal: A History of the GAA in the Parish of Ardara* (Ardara, 2004), p.10.

<sup>79</sup> P.S. Mac a ’Ghoill ‘So We Began’ in *CLG Ard a Ratha* (Ardara, 1980) pp 2-3, p.3 and ‘History of Glenties GAA club’, p.23.

<sup>80</sup> Mac Conaill (ed.), *Idir Peil agus Pobal*, p.24.

much more than the basic opportunities to participate in, or observe a match.<sup>81</sup> Unfortunately the extent of the entertainment involving Donegal clubs received scarce attention in the local press other than the occasional reference to ‘refreshments’ being provided.<sup>82</sup> It appears that it was the duty of the home team to supply these after the match. One can assume that this tradition usually took place in a local pub and it can also be presumed that it involved plenty of alcohol being consumed. St Patrick’s trip to Burt in February 1888 was rewarded ‘with true Donegal hospitality’, while after Newtowncunningham Harps’ hurling victory over Hibernians of Derry in December 1892, the visitors were entertained in Mr Patton’s public house.<sup>83</sup> Garnham has stated that claims that the GAA was ‘a bastion of healthy exercise...had little basis in fact’ despite efforts to propagate a puritan image at the time.<sup>84</sup> Some efforts were also made by the Derry county committee to provide food for visiting teams and supporters at their tournaments. In November 1890 at a tournament held on the anniversary of the founding of the GAA, a caterer from a local bakery in Bishop’s Street was given charge of supplying refreshments for the day and tickets were to be given to ‘county clubs.’<sup>85</sup>

There is even less information on the meetings held by these Donegal GAA clubs. These gatherings were generally only rarely noted and there is no evidence that any fund raising dances were held. Meetings were normally held to appoint officers and discuss the financial state and membership rates of the club. A meeting of the Cahir O’s club in December 1888 ended with chairman, D. Doherty singing ‘Old Inishowen’ but little else of their off-field activities was recorded.<sup>86</sup> This club appointed its officers on a quarterly basis

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<sup>81</sup>Hunt, ‘Parish Factions, Parading Bands and Sumptuous Repasts’, p.95.

<sup>82</sup>See for example, *DJ*, 23 June 1888.

<sup>83</sup>*DJ*, 8 Feb. 1888 and 2 Jan. 1893.

<sup>84</sup>Neal Garnham, ‘Accounting for the Early Success of the Gaelic Athletic Association’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. xxxiv, no. 133 (2004) pp 65-78, p.73.

<sup>85</sup>*DJ*, 27 Oct. 1890.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 24 Dec. 1888.

and had sufficient numbers present at a meeting in May 1890 to appoint their president, captain, treasurer, secretary and committee.<sup>87</sup>

## 1905-7

As noted, a number of Donegal's GAA clubs were heavily involved in nationalist activities in South Donegal during 1905 where an emphasis was placed on eradicating elements of British culture from Irish society. Cumann na nGaedheal outings also served as anti-recruitment drives. Having travelled to Glenties by brake and car in June, the thirty-five members of the Mountcharles Cumann na nGaedheal branch present listened to their president, Seumus MacManus, continue what he had been advocating in the local press. He called for 'the revival of the old Irish game of camán, and the substitution of Gaelic football for the football which the Saxon had introduced.'<sup>88</sup> MacManus also discouraged the youths present from joining the British army. Camán matches quickly became a vehicle for the promotion of Irish culture at these outings. On their trip to nearby Croagh in mid-July, 'March of the Camán Man' was sung during the large marching procession.<sup>89</sup> Following the scoreless draw between Inver and Croagh, nationalist speeches and recitations were given along with singing taking place with Pádraig MacGiolla Iosa leading renditions of 'Clann na nGaedhael go deo' (Clann na Gael forever). This was a reference to an Irish-American 'oath-bound organisation recognising the Supreme Council of the IRB as the legitimate "government" of Ireland.'<sup>90</sup> He then delivered an address upon 'The Duty of Ireland' and the Mountcharles choir sang 'O'Donnell Abú' (O'Donnell forever) as the large crowd listened on a height above the playing field. Events concluded with MacGiolla Iosa being presented with a camán dating back to 1875 which was to be displayed at the Oireachtas Exhibition in

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<sup>87</sup> *DJ*, 14 May 1890.

<sup>88</sup> *DP and DN*, 10 June 1905.

<sup>89</sup> *DJ*, 17 July 1905.

<sup>90</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, p.359.

Dublin.<sup>91</sup> This was an exhibition which had been established in 1897 to promote Irish culture.<sup>92</sup> This anti-English rhetoric, along with nationalist songs and speeches, were common at the Cumann na nGaedheal branch events in South Donegal. At a ceilí held at Croagh in September, chairman James Molloy illustrated the nationalist rhetoric when he claimed that they did not want to hear about English songs, dances or games being organised.<sup>93</sup>

The Grand Camán parade was organised with the help of a number of those involved in the GAA in Derry. Advertisements were placed in the local press and excursion trains were organised from Derry, Ballyshannon and Killybegs.<sup>94</sup> ‘Almost two thousand people were present’ on the strand for a camán competition between local clubs and an exhibition camán match which was played between players representing Derry and Tyrone despite the wet conditions.<sup>95</sup> This event gained the notice of the RIC and ‘a large force of police was in Mountcharles for the occasion, and in addition plain-clothes (sic) men accompanied the contingents from Derry, Strabane, Donegal and Ballyshannon.’<sup>96</sup> The cultural revival struggled to gain much impetus within Donegal society at this time and it was not until the 1920s that support for Gaelic games became more widespread, but even then GAA clubs were more interested in playing Gaelic games than other nationalist activities and attempts to promote traditional Irish customs such as the language were largely ignored.

## 1919-34

Dances, with an Irish theme, were seen as a good way of raising money amongst Donegal’s clubs in the 1920s and early 1930s. Many GAA clubs were eager to illustrate an

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<sup>91</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, p.359.

<sup>92</sup> McMahon, *Grand Opportunity: The Gaelic Revival and Irish Society*, p.156. See also *DP and DN*, 29 July 1905. MacGiolla Iosa discussed the ‘folly of emigration’ and the shame of joining the British army or the RIC at another series of camán matches at the end of July.

<sup>93</sup> *DJ*, 8 Sept. 1905.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 Oct. 1905.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 Oct. 1905.

<sup>96</sup> *DP and DN*, 14 Oct. 1905.

allegiance to Irish music and dancing at these events and the organisation of ‘foreign’ dances was banned under the rules of the GAA, with county boards asked to enforce this rule and check dance programmes in 1932.<sup>97</sup> After a dance in aid of the GAA was held in Donegal town in September 1921, it was reported that ‘Irish dances were in the ascendant. No jazzing or one stepping. Any attempt to introduce these ugly, disgusting things would have been immediately frustrated and criticised.’<sup>98</sup> At the dance on the evening of the Ardara GAA Annual Sports in August 1926 ‘Irish dances were the rule.’<sup>99</sup> Those who did not stick to these ideals, such as an unnamed Gaeltacht club in 1931 and the Gweedore GAA club the following year, were heavily criticised in the local press.<sup>100</sup> Some clubs sporadically organised whist drives in the 1920s in order to boost their funds. By 1931, card drives were said to be ‘becoming very popular in the county’ with GAA clubs in Ballybofey, Milford and Letterkenny all hosting card drives in the spring of that year.<sup>101</sup> Others were keen to help out with local charities. In August 1931, the Bundoran GAA club gave ‘valuable assistance’ in organising the athletic fixtures at a local dress parade and athletic contests’ day in aid of the St Vincent de Paul association.<sup>102</sup> The frequency of these events varied, however, and did not become weekly features of social life in Donegal.

Tadhg Ó hAnnrachain has stated that ‘as an institution, the GAA was no more successful than the state in inculcating usage of the Irish language.’<sup>103</sup> Donegal’s GAA clubs certainly failed to show much interest in co-operation with local branches of the Gaelic League. At a county board meeting in March 1925, proposals were made for collections for the Gaelic League to be made by the GAA in areas where none of the former branches

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<sup>97</sup>DD, 5 March and 2 April 1932.

<sup>98</sup>DP and DN, 3 Sept. 1921.

<sup>99</sup>DD, 21 Aug. 1926.

<sup>100</sup>DJ, 21 Dec. 1931 and 18 Nov. 1932.

<sup>101</sup>DV, 7 March 1931.

<sup>102</sup>DD, 1 Aug. 1931.

<sup>103</sup>Tadhg Ó hAnnrachain, ‘The Heroic Importance of Sport: The GAA in the 1930s’ in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 25, no. 10 (2008), pp 1326-1337, p.1334.

existed. It was also hoped that more respect would be shown for the Irish language.<sup>104</sup>

However, these ideals amounted to nothing more than rhetoric in most cases. Calls from Seán Ó Caiside for GAA clubs to form Irish language classes in October 1927 appear to have been largely ignored.<sup>105</sup> At the Ulster Gaelic League Convention in May 1928, it was hoped that co-operation between the GAA and Gaelic League would improve and ‘responsibility for calling conferences’ was given to ‘two of the Executive members of the county.’ The use of propaganda was said to be encouraging as was the revival of Gaelic League féiseanna and it was hoped these would be held in counties where none existed.<sup>106</sup> A Gaelic rally to discuss the amalgamation of the GAA and the Gaelic League was held in Ballyshannon the following month with Seán Ó Caiside presiding. The meeting was addressed by A.J. Cassidy, TD, and a provisional committee was formed.<sup>107</sup> By 1932 little had been achieved in regard to the overall aims of the Gaelic League in Donegal other than a revival of the tradition of Irish games within the GAA. At the Annual convention held in Glenties in January, chairman, Brother Lucien, stated that while much progress had been made with clubs and finance, ‘it was sufficient to play Gaelic games alone, but they were asked to enter whole-heartedly into the spirit of supporting Irish industries, the language, dancing and everything which tended to the realisation of the dreams of our ancestors and our own-namely an Irish Ireland for the Irish.’<sup>108</sup> Clearly organisation of clubs and competitions was difficult enough, and most players were happy just to play Gaelic games without giving much thought to their background. In August 1934, a cup was presented by D.C. Mac Fhionnlaoich on behalf of the Donegal Gaelic League to Guard Walsh for a schools’ hurling league but other than this, co-operation between these two bodies does not appear to have been very substantial.<sup>109</sup> As

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<sup>104</sup>*DD*, 20 March 1925.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 22 Oct. 1927.

<sup>106</sup>*DV*, 2 June 1928.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 16 June 1928.

<sup>108</sup>*DD*, 16 Jan. 1932.

<sup>109</sup>*DJ*, 10 Aug. 1934.



noted earlier, the failure of the Gaelic League to develop in Donegal may have hindered the development of the GAA at various stages, but it must be noted that once the latter organisation did begin to become established in the 1920s, little effort was made by the county board and clubs to organise off field activities associated with the promotion of the Irish culture other than GAA affairs.

### **III: Players and administrators**

#### **1888-92**

RIC reports provide some indication of club membership of Burt Hibernians, Cahir O's and Newtowncunningham Harps in 1890. These clubs had between them approximately sixty-eight members. The fact that they did not all have enough members to each field the maximum numbers of players allowed on a team, also shows that membership was not huge. Burt Hibernians had twenty members while Newtowncunningham Harps and Cahir O's were both said to have twenty-four registered on their books. The rural nature of these clubs with their lower population rates can be compared with five clubs in Derry city which had altogether an estimated 252 members. 1889 Derry hurling and Gaelic football champions Hibernians were said to have seventy-four members which illustrates the gulf in strength and support between a city club and one in rural Donegal.<sup>110</sup> While these figures may have not been totally accurate, they do provide a rough guide to the numbers in each club and are generally the only record available of membership taken. Marcus De Burca has calculated in conjunction with Michael Cusack's estimates for 1888, which stated that the GAA had 'about 1,250 clubs' nationwide with 50,000 members, that there would have been about forty

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<sup>110</sup> Crime Department Special Branch Report on the GAA in the Northern Division: Progress Made During the Year Ended 31 Dec. 1890. 10 Feb. 1891. 2701/S.

persons per club.<sup>111</sup> Therefore the three Donegal clubs' membership figures estimated by the RIC in 1890 were well below countrywide figures around that time.

Unfortunately, the lack of remaining census records from 1891 and sufficient biographical data in the press prevents a detailed analysis of the socio-occupational status of a large number of players. However it is possible to examine a small number of players from the Burt Hibernians and Cahir O's clubs using the 1901 census, newspaper sources and the Burt club's official history. Out of forty-four players used by these teams in the 1888-92 period, twenty were positively identified. Unsurprisingly, given the rural nature of these clubs, eleven players were found to have been employed in agriculture. Seven players were involved in industrial work while two others were employed in the commercial sector. Players ranged in age from fifteen to forty-eight years of age and the majority were Roman Catholics. The ratio of married to single men was almost equal.<sup>112</sup>

It is also possible to briefly examine the backgrounds of a number of administrators. However the same type of problem exists with difficulty in distinguishing between names in areas such as Buncrana where common names make it impossible to establish exactly who these men were; for example, a John O'Donnell was a member of the Cahir O's committee in 1890 but there are three of these of a suitable age group in the 1901 census returns of this town. Marcus de Burca's tracing of eight members of the Derry GAA county board in 1890 has shown that these men were drawn from the industrial (50%), commercial (25%), agricultural (12.5%) and professional (12.5%) classes which illustrates the city based nature of this board and the majority of its clubs.<sup>113</sup> Nationally, De Burca has looked at a total of forty-nine delegates from the county boards of Leitrim, Sligo, Louth and Derry around this

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<sup>111</sup> De Burca, *The GAA: A History*, pp 40-1.

<sup>112</sup> *DJ*, 1888-1892 and 'Census of Ireland 1901 and 1911' Retrieved from <http://census.nationalarchives.ie> [accessed 10 Dec. 2011].

<sup>113</sup> Marcus Bourke, 'The Early GAA in South Ulster' in *The Clogher Record*, vol. 7, no.1 (1969), pp 5-26, p.25.

time and it is clear that the majority of delegates (over 63%) were from the industrial and agricultural sectors with commercial and professional classes making up the rest.<sup>114</sup> Only one Donegal delegate, Bernard McElhinney, a farmer representing the Portlough Harps club, was listed as being on the Derry committee. However we know the names of three other Donegal men on this committee this year.<sup>115</sup> Again the difficulty lies in establishing in which sectors they were employed. It is again clear that a number of those with positions in Donegal clubs who have been identified came from the industrial and agricultural sectors. Burt Hibernians' player, treasurer and secretary, Charles Dowds, was a fifteen year old blacksmith in 1890 and was an important figure in the club.<sup>116</sup> He was still involved in the early 1900s and captained the 1907 Ulster championship winning team and may have been responsible for keeping the club together in the 1890s.<sup>117</sup> Newtowncunningham Harps' delegate John McElhinney was an agricultural labourer while the occupation of Buncrana Emmets' delegate H. McNeill is unclear. It is also difficult to clearly establish the occupations of those mentioned by the RIC as holding positions in Donegal GAA clubs. Burt Hibernians' 1890 captain Joseph Campbell, an agricultural labourer, would only have been fifteen at this time and it is evident that Burt had a number of teenagers in their team. Cahir O's treasurer William Henry Eakin was a general labourer while their captain James Harkin was an insurance agent. Biographical details for Newtowncunningham Harps' captain Edward Monaghan, Cahir O's captain James Doherty and their secretary William Doherty are unfortunately lacking in clarity.<sup>118</sup> However, it is clear that Donegal's GAA clubs at the time drew their membership largely from those involved in agricultural and industrial work.

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<sup>114</sup>Bourke, 'The Early GAA in South Ulster', pp 25-6.

<sup>115</sup>*DJ*, 3 Oct. 1890.

<sup>116</sup>Crime Department Special Branch Report on the GAA in the Northern Division: Progress Made During the Year Ended 31 Dec. 1890. 10 Feb. 1891. 2701/S.

<sup>117</sup> Campbell, Dowds and Mullan (eds.), *Against the Grain*, p.88.

<sup>118</sup> Crime Department Special Branch Report on the GAA made in the Northern Division, progress made during the year ended 31 Dec. 1890. 10 Feb. 1891. 2701/S.

## 1905-7

The availability of 1901 and 1911 census returns meant that a more detailed analysis could be made of the occupations of those who participated in the 1906 Gaelic football teams of Lámh Dearg (Letterkenny), Lámh Dearg (Mountcharles), Killybegs, Dunkineely, Balldearg, Gweedore Old Celts and St Columba's of Churchill. The camán teams of the aforementioned Balldearg, Letterkenny and Mountcharles GAA clubs, Sinn Féin (Bundoran), Burt Hibernians, St Mura's of Fahan and Newtowncunningham Harps were also used. Obviously not all players' occupations could be identified due to emigration in some cases by 1911 and difficulties with differentiating between common names. The local press failed to note the playing members of every club.

Table 6.1: Occupational categories of GAA players in County Donegal, 1905-7.

Category	Number of players	% of total
1:Professional class	13	6.66
2:Domestic class	4	2.05
3:Commercial class	20	10.25
4:Agricultural class	80	41.02
5:Industrial class	63	32.3
6:Indefinite and non-productive class	15	7.69
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100</b>

Sources: *DJ, DP and DN, DV, DI* 1905-7 and 'Census of Ireland 1901 and 1911' Retrieved from <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/> [accessed 10 Dec. 2011]

A total of 254 camán and Gaelic football players were named in the local press in the period from 1905-7 and it was possible to identify 195 of these players. Hunt has established

that players in his study came primarily from the agricultural class (61.8%) with the commercial class (21.2%), industrial class (14.8%) and professional class (2.2%) following behind. There were no players from the domestic class participating in these GAA clubs. His study of 500 men included both Gaelic football and hurling players. Richard McElligott has also produced an extensive study of Kerry GAA players and has noted that of 910 players active there between 1888 and 1916, it was the agricultural sector in which the greatest number were employed (38.35%). This was followed by 33.29% in the industrial sector while 18.68% were involved in commercial work. Professionals made up 5.27% of the overall figure. Less than 3% were classified as students and unknowns while only 1.53% of players were employed domestically.<sup>119</sup> Like those analysed by Hunt and McElligott, of those recorded as having participated in Gaelic games in County Donegal from 1905 until 1908, the majority of these, 41.02%, came from the agricultural class. 32.03% of the total number of players identified were working in the industrial sector at this time while those in the commercial class made up over one tenth (10.25%) of the total number. Those described as professionals took up 6.66% while the domestic class and the unclassified category together made up only 9.74% of the overall figure. A number of rurally based clubs certainly were made up primarily of those involved in agriculture, most notably Newtowncunningham Harps (fifteen out of nineteen identified), St Columba's of Churchill (nine out of ten identified) and St Mura's of Fahan (fifteen out of seventeen identified). Generally, clubs seemed to attract players mainly from the agricultural and industrial areas. Unsurprisingly there was less involvement from the agricultural sector in more urban based areas such as Bundoran where, out of a total of fifteen players identified, five worked in the industrial sector and four were involved in commercial work with only two employed in farming.

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<sup>119</sup>McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom', p.119.

Almost 82% of the 195 players were single and this meant that they had more free time to devote to their clubs. The figure for married players was higher than that found elsewhere. 15.89% of Donegal's players were married and this was a higher percentage than that found by McElligott and Hunt. In Kerry, 6.2% of the players were married while the players analysed by Hunt 'were almost totally single.'<sup>120</sup> Hunt has also stated that 'marriage brought responsibilities and new financial obligations to a group with limited social income, and lifestyle decisions were made that excluded physical recreation.'<sup>121</sup> The fact that most of the players in Donegal were Roman Catholic (96.92%) illustrates that Gaelic games were predominately seen as being a nationalist pastime. This was similar to the findings of Hunt and McElligott although the ratio was slightly higher in Kerry than in Donegal as 98% of the players there were Catholics.<sup>122</sup> The largest number of players in Donegal were aged between 21 and 25 years of age (31.28%) with the smallest number (2.05%) being aged 15 or under. The majority of players identified by Hunt (45%) and McElligott (37.6%) also came from the 21-25 age bracket.<sup>123</sup> Of the 195 Donegal players identified, there was only one whose age was unrecorded. The average age of a GAA player in Donegal was calculated to be 24.29 years old. This was marginally older than the average age in Kerry which was 23.67 years old and that of those in Hunt's survey, who had an average age of 23.2 years of age.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom', p.128 and Hunt, 'The GAA: Social Structure' p.192.

<sup>121</sup>Hunt 'The GAA-Social Structure', p.192.

<sup>122</sup> McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom', p.129.

<sup>123</sup>Hunt, 'The GAA: Social Structure', p.192 and McElligott 'Forging a Kingdom', p.127.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.,

Table 6.2: Ages of GAA players in County Donegal, 1905-7.

Age	Number	% of Total
15 and under	4	2.05
16-20	57	29.23
21-25	61	31.28
26-30	33	16.92
31-35	19	9.74
36-40	14	7.17
41-45	6	3.07
<b>Total</b>	195	100%

Sources: *DJ, DP and DN, DV, DI* 1905-7 and 'Census of Ireland 1901 and 1911' Retrieved from <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/> [accessed 10 Dec. 2011].

As noted earlier, the majority of soccer players identified from the period 1891 to 1915 were found to be from the industrial category (44.41%). This differed from the findings on those playing Gaelic games in Donegal between 1905 and 1907 where the majority (41.02%), were employed in the agricultural sector. This suggests that soccer was more prominent in larger towns while GAA players were more rurally based. In contrast, only 32.3% of all GAA players were employed in industrial work, while only 29.72% of soccer players were found to be working in the agricultural sector. This may be a result of the rural based nature of a number of GAA clubs such as St Columb's of Churchill, Newtowncunningham Harps and St Mura's of Fahan as opposed to the urban-based nature of many soccer clubs.

Playing soccer also attracted the interest of more professional men (11.19%) than Gaelic games (6.66%) in Donegal while there was more involvement of those from the commercial classes in Gaelic football and camán/hurling (10.25%) than in soccer (8.04%). The amount of involvement of those in the domestic categories was similar with soccer attracting slightly more (2.80% as opposed to 2.05% in Gaelic games) from this sector. Soccer appears to have attracted fewer students than Gaelic games in Donegal as figures for

those categorised in the Indefinite and non-productive class were higher in the GAA data assessed. The majority of soccer players in Donegal (36.36%) were drawn from a younger age category (16-20 years old) than Gaelic games where most players (31.28%) came from the 21-25 age category. The average age of a soccer player in Donegal was found to be 23.01 years old which is again slightly younger than those playing Gaelic games (24.29 years old). Figures for the marital status of soccer players were quite similar to those of GAA players with 81.11% of association football players falling into the single category while 15.03% were married.

Given the GAA's nationalist ethos, it was to be expected that there would be more involvement of non-Roman Catholics in association football. While 96.92% of Gaelic players identified in the county were Catholics, only 85.31% of soccer players came from this denomination. This divergence in involvement may therefore have strengthened soccer's popularity in the county as non-Catholic attitudes to Gaelic games clearly varied with other religious denominations more likely to take part in soccer.

Using information gathered in newspapers it was possible to trace the social background of ninety-one Donegal GAA officials from 129 of these named for the period from 1905 until 1907. These included county board and club presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries, treasurers, captains, vice-captains and delegates from fifteen clubs.<sup>125</sup> What is notable about table 6.3 is that the professional class was more involved as officials than as players with 31.86% of the total coming from this sector. This was the highest percentage of any class. This can be explained by the presence of the clergy and national school teachers who, in their role as pillars of society, were eager to organise Gaelic games for those in their

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<sup>125</sup>See Table 6.3. These included county board officials and those from the clubs of Balldearg, Lámh Dearg (Mountcharles), Clann Conaill (Brackey), Ardara, Killybegs, Lámh Dearg (Letterkenny), Gweedore Old Celts, True Gaels (Meenabradan), Ethna Carberry (Croagh), Killygordon, Glenfin, Naomh Conaill (Kilraine), Dunkineely, Newtowncunningham Harps, St Mura's (Fahan) and Creeslough.



localities. They also probably had more experience of organisation and paperwork necessary for this task. The clergy of the Roman Catholic Church were heavily involved in the 1905 county board while the involvement of national school teachers can be seen in the example of the Gweedore Old Celts. This club benefited from the presence of no less than six national school teachers on its committee.<sup>126</sup> The involvement of the industrial class was also significant at 25.27% involved. The shift from the strength of the agricultural sector as players to a more secondary role in administration can be seen in the fact that only 21.97% of this group were involved as officials. Involvement of the domestic classes was non-existent while just 1.09% came from the indefinite and non-descriptive category. Richard McElligott has noted from his study of GAA officials in Kerry in the years between 1888 and 1916 that it was the commercial class (40.56%) which had the greatest involvement in the GAA there. This differs from Donegal and there was also more involvement of the industrial (22.16%) and agricultural (21.22%) classes than professionals in Kerry who made up just 15.09%.<sup>127</sup> The oldest official in County Donegal was sixty-four years old while the youngest was just seventeen years of age. Again the majority of those identified were Roman Catholics (95.60%) while Presbyterians (2.19%) and Church of Ireland (2.19%) made up the rest. 64.83% of officials were single which, as previously noted, meant more time for recreational activities.

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<sup>126</sup>See *DJ*, 25 Oct. 1905 and *DP and DN*, 18 Nov. 1905.

<sup>127</sup>McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom', p.126.

Table 6.3: Occupational categories of Donegal GAA officials, 1905-7.

Category	Number of officials	% of total
1:Professional class	29	31.86%
2: Domestic class	0	0%
3:Commercial class	18	19.78%
4:Agricultural class	20	21.97%
5:Industrial class	23	25.27%
6:Indefinite and non-productive class	1	1.09%
Overall total	91	100%

Sources: *DJ, DP and DN, DV, DI* 1905-7 and 'Census of Ireland 1901 and 1911' Retrieved from <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/> [accessed 10 Dec. 2011]

The organisers of soccer in Donegal differed to those of Gaelic games in that the majority of involvement came from those in the industrial category (34.35%) as opposed to the GAA where this figure was just over a quarter of the total number assessed. As mentioned, the majority of GAA organisers came from the professional category (31.86%) while only 28.72% of soccer organisers were identified as professionals. This contrast can be partially explained by a lack of involvement in soccer from the clergy and national school teachers. 12.08% of those organising the GAA in Donegal between 1905-7 were clergy of the Roman Catholic church while only 1.02% of those involved as club presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries, treasurers, captains, vice-captains and delegates of soccer clubs were found to be members of the clergy. Similarly, national school teachers' involvement in Gaelic games was greater than in soccer in the periods compared here. Only 5.12% of soccer organisers were registered as teachers while 14.29% of the GAA administrators had experience of national school teaching. In contrast, some well-to-do members of society, such

as doctors, failed to get involved in the GAA in the 1905-7 period. The County Donegal FA could boast of the involvement of professional individuals such as doctors Patterson, Carre, McFadden and Loughnan at various times during the 1890s while there is no evidence that any medical doctors became involved in the GAA as organisers between 1905-7.

### **1919-34**

Unfortunately, access to the 1926 Census of Ireland is not yet available and therefore an analysis of the social background of players and administrators from the 1919-34 period could not be undertaken. However, any study of the GAA in Donegal for the years covered in this thesis would be rather incomplete without reference being made to two professional groups whose impact undoubtedly strengthened the development of Gaelic games in the county. As shown above, national school teachers played a significant role in the 1905-7 GAA both as players and administrators and were again heavily involved in the years from 1919-34. The role of the Garda Síochána, the newly formed police force, must also be addressed as the transferral of Gardaí from areas outside the county undoubtedly put new life into the Donegal GAA in the 1920s and 1930s. As Marcus de Burca has stated, ‘throughout the country Garda support provided a badly-needed stimulus in areas where native games had previously not gained wide local acceptance.’<sup>128</sup> The impact of this post-1922 transferral of staff on local communities and GAA clubs still awaits a full-length study at academic level.

The involvement of school teachers was also not unique to Donegal, although the study of schools’ sport in Ireland also lacks a definitive history. Writing in *The Irish Press GAA Golden Jubilee Supplement* in 1934, ‘Rhyzone’ stated that ‘you’ll find a national school teacher in every club-because the colleges where these men are trained are truly Gaelic.’<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>De Burca, *The GAA: A History*, p.131.

<sup>129</sup>*The Irish Press GAA Golden Jubilee Supplement* 1934, p. 26.

He went on to state that in colleges such as St Patrick's, Drumcondra and De La Salle, Waterford, social conditions undoubtedly contributed to the development of a pro-GAA ideology. While perhaps somewhat exaggerated, national school teachers certainly played a prominent role in developing the GAA in Donegal. Using biographical data from newspapers, an examination of the occupations of those involved in the Donegal county board between 1919 and 1934 illustrates the significance of national school teachers in the highest administrative offices of the county board as chairmen, secretaries and treasurers. As can be seen in table 6.4 below, Out of a total of forty-eight positions available in these years, national school teachers occupied at least 50% of these. Admittedly, some officers retained their positions for long spells but there was an unquestionable influence of national school teachers within the county board, particularly after 1924, with Seán Ó Caiside, Charles McDyer, Seán Ó Cinneide, Joe Maguire, P.J. McGinn, Aidan Sweeney and Seán Conaghan all involved in various roles. There was also a notable involvement of members of Dáil Éireann but this had lessened significantly by the middle of the decade.

Table 6.4: Names and occupations of chairmen, secretaries and treasurers holding positions in the Donegal GAA county board, 1919-34.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Chairman</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
1919	<b>Sam O'Flaherty</b>	Army commandant	<b>John Curran</b>	Foreman, Printers	<b>Patrick McCartan</b>	<b>Unknown</b>
1920	<b>Sam O'Flaherty</b>	Army commandant	<b>John Curran</b>	Foreman, Printers	<b>John Curran</b>	Foreman, Printers
1921	<b>Sam O'Flaherty</b>	TD	<b>John Curran</b>	Foreman, Printers	<b>John Curran</b>	Foreman, Printers
1922	<b>Sam O'Flaherty</b>	TD	<b>John Curran</b>	Foreman, Printers	<b>John Curran</b>	Foreman, Printers
1923	<b>P.J. Ward</b>	TD	<b>John Curran</b>	Foreman, Printers	<b>John Curran</b>	Foreman, Printers
1924	<b>P.J. Ward</b>	TD	<b>John Curran</b>	Foreman, Printers	<b>John Curran</b>	Foreman, Printers
1925	<b>Seán Ó Caiside</b>	NS teacher	<b>John Curran</b>	Foreman, Printers	<b>Seán Conaghan</b>	NS teacher
1926	<b>Seán Ó Caiside</b>	NS teacher	<b>Michael Dawson</b>	Civil Engineer	<b>Seán Conaghan</b>	NS teacher
1927	<b>Seán Ó Caiside</b>	NS teacher	<b>Eunan Coyle</b>	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>Seán Conaghan</b>	NS teacher
1928	<b>Seán Ó Caiside</b>	NS teacher	<b>Charles McDyer</b>	NS teacher	<b>Seán Conaghan</b>	NS teacher
1929	<b>Seán Ó Caiside</b>	NS teacher	<b>Charles McDyer</b>	NS teacher	<b>Seán Conaghan</b>	NS teacher
1930	<b>Michael Dawson</b>	Civil Engineer	<b>P.J. McGinn</b>	NS teacher	<b>Seán Conaghan</b>	NS teacher
1931	<b>Brother Lucien</b>	Clergy, Catholic Church	<b>Aidan Sweeney</b>	NS teacher	<b>Seán Conaghan</b>	NS teacher
1932	<b>Brian Brady</b>	TD	<b>Seán Conaghan</b>	NS teacher	<b>Seán Conaghan</b>	NS teacher
1933	<b>Seán Ó Caiside</b>	NS teacher	<b>Joe Maguire</b>	NS teacher	<b>Seán Conaghan</b>	NS teacher
1934	<b>Charles McDyer</b>	NS teacher	<b>Seán Kennedy</b>	NS teacher	<b>Seán Conaghan</b>	NS teacher

Sources: *DJ, DP and DN, DV, DI* 1919-34 and An t-Ath Seán Ó Gallchóir, *The Raidió na Gaeltachta Book of Donegal GAA Facts*, p. 97. I am grateful to Dónal McAnallen for his assistance with a number of these occupations.

These teachers had probably been active in Gaelic games while at college and significantly had an almost missionary zeal in their drive to promote the GAA in Donegal.

Added to this, they were able to benefit from shorter working hours and longer holidays than most other workers and could put their administrative skills to good use. In contrast, evidence in the local press that national school teachers were heavily involved in the promotion of soccer competitions at this time is less obvious.<sup>130</sup> The exact amount of involvement at GAA club level is perhaps more difficult to analyse but undoubtedly many clubs benefited from their input. The importance of teachers to the development of the GAA was encouraged by county board delegate Joe McDevitt in February 1925 at a meeting of the South Donegal District League when he stated that it was ‘the duty of teachers, especially in County Donegal, to get [Gaelic] football and hurling into the schools and to encourage these games as much as it is in their power.’<sup>131</sup> This meant that, at least in theory, these men were able to encourage the playing of Gaelic football and hurling in their schools and get younger players involved at an early age.

Dónal McAnallen has noted the significance of army members and the Garda Síochána in the development of the GAA in Monaghan, Cavan and Donegal in the years after 1922. Top class players from Leinster and Munster boosted county teams, in particular the Gaelic football side of Monaghan and the hurling selections of Donegal and Cavan.<sup>132</sup> Liam McNiffe has stated that ‘in the early years of the [Free] State’s existence there were almost 7,000 young men in the Garda Síochána, most of them in their early twenties.’<sup>133</sup> Many of these young men were therefore at a suitable age for participation in sport and Garda Commissioner Eoin O’Duffy was eager to avail of this. In 1923 he issued a circular ‘urging

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<sup>130</sup> An extensive trawl of information on soccer clubs and organising committees in the press revealed few references to the involvement of National School teachers in the 1920s and early 1930s. These men were usually denoted with an ‘NT’ in GAA news. One exception was J. O’Boyce who presented medals after a Portsalon soccer tournament in May 1932. (See *DJ*, 20 May 1932).

<sup>131</sup> *DD*, 6 Feb. 1925.

<sup>132</sup> Dónal McAnallen, ‘Cén Fath a Raibh Cúige Uladh Chomh Lag Chomh Fada Sin?’ in Dónal McAnallen, David Hassan and Roddy Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA: Ulaidh, Éire agus Eile*, pp 138-51, p.148.

<sup>133</sup> Liam McNiffe, *A History of the Garda Síochána: A Social History of the Force 1922-52, With An Overview of the Years 1952-97* (Dublin, 1997), p.113.

the Civic Guards to join local hurling, (Gaelic) football and athletic clubs' and later that year stated that Garda members should not play soccer or rugby.<sup>134</sup>

However, not everybody was convinced of the fairness of GAA clubs recruiting these men. After Ardara had defeated Glenties in the South-west district league in December 1922, one reporter felt that

the entry into the county of such powerful exponents of Gaelic football as are to be found amongst the Civic Guard, would warrant a strict reversal to the parish rule of the official rules of the GAA, otherwise the game in the county will suffer, for local clubs are unable, from their isolation, to hold their own against a concentration of professional ability.<sup>135</sup>

The selection of non-Donnegal natives for the county hurling team which won the Ulster final in April 1924 was also viewed negatively by some Gaels. This team was 'largely composed of members of the Civic Guards' and this did not sit well with those who felt local players could have done just as well.<sup>136</sup> The Burt GAA club challenged the county team to a match later that month and, although this did not take place, in October an Inishowen selection defeated 'the pick of the Civic Guards.'<sup>137</sup>

Despite these criticisms, there can be no doubt that some GAA clubs were, at least initially, immensely strengthened by the participation of the Gardaí, both as players and administrators. Glenties had the presence of 'four stalwarts of the Civic Guard' along with Captain Kavanagh of the National Army in the above game while the Donegal Young Tír Conaills team which defeated Ardara in February 1924 also included four Gardaí.<sup>138</sup> Hurling clubs also benefited and Letterkenny were said to have 'about twelve' Gardaí in their panel

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<sup>134</sup>McNiffe, *A History of the Garda Síochána*, p.113.

<sup>135</sup>*DJ*, 22 Dec. 1922.

<sup>136</sup>*DD*, 11 April 1924.

<sup>137</sup>*DJ*, 25 April 1924 and *DD*, 10 Oct. 1924.

<sup>138</sup>*DJ*, 22 Dec. 1922 and 2 Nov. 1923 and *DD*, 8 Feb, 1924. This Donegal town team went on to win the county championship that year.

prior to the 1924 county final against Aodh Ruadh.<sup>139</sup> At a Donegal GAA county board meeting in November 1923, Ulster Council president B.C. Fay praised the work of Chief Superintendent Seán B. MacManus and the Gardaí, who were said to be ‘great acquisitions to the local clubs.’<sup>140</sup> Members of the Gardaí were also involved as referees and this no doubt helped the organisation of Gaelic football.<sup>141</sup> The revival of hurling in Inishowen in 1923 was said to be partially due to the Garda Síochána who had ‘given a great impetus to the game’ there and it was noted that they had ‘facilitated these players in every possible manner.’<sup>142</sup> As noted, Guard Walsh was prominent in the setting up of the hurling county board in May 1933.<sup>143</sup> Administrative involvement at club level was also notable in some areas. The re-organisation of the GAA in Letterkenny in 1930 was said to have been largely due to the input of Superintendent Cronin, and there were no fewer than three other Guards in attendance at this meeting with Chief Superintendent Leahy presiding.<sup>144</sup>

Transferral of Gardaí was therefore a blow to the county board and clubs, given that these men were frequently sent around the country. The county board lost the input of Chief Superintendent MacManus when he was moved to Galway in June 1924; the following year the transferral of Guard Patrick Nash to Milford was ‘much regretted by the Gaels of Ballyshannon’ as he had played regularly with their hurling team.<sup>145</sup> Although the Aodh Ruadh club were able to continue, it was in weaker GAA areas that the loss of these players was more severely felt. Even temporary absence could damage a club. Milford GAA club lamented the loss of Guard Neary, ‘an energetic worker and a strong advocate of the national pastimes’ through injury in October 1930 as his absence was said to have been ‘a severe loss

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<sup>139</sup>*DD*, 14 Nov. 1924.

<sup>140</sup>*DJ*, 23 Nov. 1923.

<sup>141</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 Dec. 1932.

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 Jan. 1924.

<sup>143</sup>*Ibid.*, 5 May 1933.

<sup>144</sup>*DD*, 8 Feb. 1930 and *DJ*, 13 Nov. 1931.

<sup>145</sup>*DJ*, 30 June 1924 and *DD*, 30 Jan. 1925.



to those who are carrying on against big odds.’<sup>146</sup> Transferral seriously impacted on the decline of this club and in March 1932 it was stated that it had been ‘built up on members of the Gardaí’ and ‘there were vacancies left in the team which frequent transfers caused and at the same time failed to provide substitutes.’<sup>147</sup> This loss of players and inter-changing of teams no doubt hindered the development of hurling to some extent as a lack of permanency was not conducive to clubs’ aspirations.

Liam McNiffe has stated that ‘from about 1935 onwards there was a gradual but inexorable decline in active participation by Gardaí in sport’ mainly due to the replacing of O’Duffy in 1933 and the fact that his successor Eamon Broy was not as encouraging towards sport.<sup>148</sup> It is difficult to establish when Garda participation in the GAA in Donegal was at its peak but in February 1928, county chairman Seán Ó Caiside complained at the annual county convention that the Gardaí ‘as a body were not doing their duty towards the Gaelic games’ and ‘in their apathy...the Guards were not acting in accordance with the wishes of their Chief Commissioner.’<sup>149</sup> This appears to be a reference to problems experienced by the Ballybofey club the previous month as they failed to get their Garda players released for a match in Letterkenny.<sup>150</sup> However, this seems to have been an isolated incident. The Garda Síochána had clearly helped put the GAA on a stronger footing in the county and without their influence, the development of Gaelic games in Donegal would have been further delayed.

#### **IV: Patrons**

##### **1888-92**

As Neil Tranter has noted in his study of organised sport in Central Scotland in the nineteenth century, ‘monetary donations were a common feature of patronage in most

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<sup>146</sup>*DJ*, 6 Oct. 1930.

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, 11 March 1932.

<sup>148</sup>McNiffe, *A History of the Garda Síochána*, p.116.

<sup>149</sup>*DJ*, 17 Feb. 1928.

<sup>150</sup>*Ibid.*, 13 Jan. 1928.

sports.’<sup>151</sup> Certainly the earliest Donegal GAA clubs were able to raise subscriptions and travel to away matches but there is little mention in the local press that they attracted the interest, involvement or financial backing of the more prominent members of society. This was in contrast to soccer clubs such as Letterkenny FC who in October 1891 received a subscription of £5 from County Tyrone Unionist politician and linen manufacturer, E.T. Herdman, JP, DL, and Ramelton Sunbursts, who received £2 from the same man the following February.<sup>152</sup> In March 1892, Ramelton FC received a ‘liberal’ subscription from gentleman and farmer, James W. Fullerton and by the beginning of the 1892-3 season, both Buncrana FC and Moville FC were each able to report that they had the sum of £20 on their hands.<sup>153</sup> Cricket clubs also received the support of prominent locals such as doctors and the military, while there is little evidence that the early GAA clubs did likewise or managed to form significant social networks.<sup>154</sup>

While in their early days the Burt Hibernians benefited from the donation of £5 given by Matthew McCay, a farmer and director of a nearby building company, it is difficult to establish exactly how much financial aid, if any, the other Donegal GAA clubs received from external sources.<sup>155</sup> The lack of finance available to the Burt club is also illustrated in the fact that they played barefooted at the Christmas tournament in 1888.<sup>156</sup> Other clubs were quick to raise funds for their equipment. Only a few months after their formation, Newtowncunningham Harps appear to have been in a sound financial condition. By April 1890 it was being claimed that they were in a position to purchase ‘twenty-one suits of uniform’ and it was noted that ‘besides a splendid stock of hurleys, the treasurer still has a

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<sup>151</sup> Neil Tranter, ‘The Patronage of Organized Sport in Central Scotland, 1820-1900’ in *Journal of Sports History*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1989), pp 227-47., p.229.

<sup>152</sup> *DJ*, 28 Oct. 1891 and 29 Feb. 1892. See also *Ibid.*, 1 Jan. 1892. The Letterkenny club also received financial aid from their president Major H.A. Doyne, JP, and W.H. Boyd, JP at the end of 1891.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 March, 21 Sept. and 28 Sept. 1892.

<sup>154</sup> See, for example, *DV*, 6 July 1889, 25 Sept. 1891 and *DJ*, 27 May 1892.

<sup>155</sup> Campbell, Dowds and Mullen (eds.), *Against the Grain*, p.80

<sup>156</sup> *DJ*, 28 Dec. 1888.

surplus of £10 in his till.<sup>157</sup> One can only assume that this was raised through subscriptions and local patronage given that the source of the financial aid went unrecorded.<sup>158</sup>

### 1905-7

With the rise of cultural nationalism, Donegal's GAA clubs began to attract more interest than those in the 1888-92 period had managed and a number of those with social influence were willing to act as patrons. Most notable of these were the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church. The role of the clergy in the GAA has been discussed in a number of works. Despite initial support in the 1880s, this had declined, perhaps most notably in parts of Ulster, by the end of the decade with clerical condemnation of the GAA evident in Armagh, Monaghan and Fermanagh as accusations of IRB involvement became commonplace.<sup>159</sup> Marcus DeBurca has noted the support given to the GAA by Bishop Patrick O'Donnell of the Raphoe diocese in Donegal as being an exception, along with that of Archbishop Croke's successor, Fennelly, in the early 1900s.<sup>160</sup> Simon Gillespie and Roddy Hegarty have stated that in the years 1884 to 1902 'no single, coherent attitude towards the GAA was adopted by the Catholic Church...rather there were disparate responses depending on the attitudes of individual members of the clergy, varying circumstances within different dioceses and the GAA, and, crucially at times, the opinion of the local bishop.'<sup>161</sup> Paul Rouse believes that prior to the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, relations between the two organisations had been strained due to 'the prominent presence of leading republicans' within the GAA.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *DJ*, 21 April 1890.

<sup>158</sup> See also *Ibid.*, 24 Dec. 1888. The use of subscriptions for the running of the Cahir O's GAA club was noted at their meeting in December 1888.

<sup>159</sup> Crime Branch Special DICS Reports Box 6. Monthly Secret Report of the Northern Division, 6 Feb. 1889 522/9501 and 2 June 1889, 521/9983.

<sup>160</sup> De Burca, *The GAA: A History*, p.64.

<sup>161</sup> Simon Gillespie and Roddy Hegarty, 'Camán and Crozier: The Catholic Church and the GAA 1884-1902' in Donal McAnallen, David Hassan and Roddy Hegarty, *The Evolution of the GAA: Ulaidh, Éire agus Eile* (Armagh, 2009), pp 112-22, p.122.

<sup>162</sup> Paul Rouse, 'The Hand of Power' in *Celebrating 125 years of the GAA* in *The Irish Times*, 29 Jan. 2009, pp 51-3, p.52.

A number Donegal's clergy offered financial support in the 1905-7 period but perhaps most significantly, both Canon McFadden and the Reverend Edward Maguire gave Gaelic games their public backing while criticising 'foreign' games at Cumann na nGaedheal rallies.<sup>163</sup> Desmond Murphy has stated that at this time a number of priests were so disillusioned with society in Donegal that they briefly supported local branches of Cumann na nGaedheal around Donegal town.<sup>164</sup> There is scarce evidence that there was any major clerical involvement within the GAA in Donegal prior to this. Jim MacLaughlin claims that 'as leaders of "their people" priests in particular were responsible for instilling a deeply conservative sense of patriotism in Donegal.'<sup>165</sup> Seumus MacManus was probably aware of this and used his considerable organising skills to try to win over the support of the common people and advance the Gaelic Revival through the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church. The Grand Camán Parade was held with the co-operation of those in the local Catholic Church. The day began with a march to the Mountcharles Catholic church, where mass was celebrated by the Very Reverend Edward Maguire. Afterwards the congregation moved on to Inver strand where the Very Reverend Maguire took the chair on the motion of *Donegal Independent* editor P.A. Mooney and Dunkineely draper and publican Peter Ward.<sup>166</sup> Letters from Bishop Patrick O'Donnell and the Reverend J.C. Cannon supporting the movement and native pastimes were then read aloud.<sup>167</sup> Bishop O'Donnell saw the abstinence from alcohol as being fundamental to the growth of Gaelic games. This view was echoed by MacManus in his own speech, and he encouraged the promotion of the Irish Ireland movement which called for the use of the Irish language, playing of Gaelic games and purchasing of Irish manufactured goods. The Reverend James C. Cannon claimed that 'the whole movement will

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<sup>163</sup>See *DJ*, 7 June and 11 Aug. 1905.

<sup>164</sup>Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster*, p.195.

<sup>165</sup>Jim MacLaughlin, 'The Age of Transition' in Mac Laughlin (ed.), *Donegal: The Making of a Northern county*, pp 283-91, p.288.

<sup>166</sup> *DJ*, 9 Oct. 1905.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*,

give renewed spirit to the fine old social spirit of Tír Conaill which is now, as it has been in the stories past, the spirit of a true Irish Ireland.’ The meeting concluded after a number of nationalist speeches and the singing of ‘God Save Ireland.’<sup>168</sup>

At the foundation meeting of the county board on 23 October 1905, Bishop O’Donnell, the Very Reverend Dr Maguire and Reverend James C. Cannon were all given significant roles. The event was presided over by the Very Reverend Dr Maguire while Bishop O’Donnell was appointed patron and gave his promise that he would donate a cup for camán purposes which was to be competed for between the east and west champions.<sup>169</sup> This final would take place at a festival organised by the Bishop to promote Irish culture and to raise funds for the building of St Eunan’s College and this no doubt added to the prestige of the competition.<sup>170</sup> The administrative skills of the clergy were not overlooked. Vice-Presidents appointed included the Reverend James C. Cannon (east) with the Reverend C. Boyce being appointed to look after the western division’s financial matters.<sup>171</sup>

The Very Reverend Dr Maguire was initially keen to organise clubs as well as offer financial support and stated that he would write to his friends throughout Donegal to ask them to set up clubs.<sup>172</sup> The following month a manifesto written by he and the two divisional secretaries was published in the local press and an appeal was made ‘to the youth of the county in general, and in particular to leading men (both young and old) in each district in the county where a Gaelic athletic club is not already formed, to found such at once.’<sup>173</sup> This was critical, they believed, ‘so that no district in Donegal may any longer lie under the reproach of lagging in shame when Ireland has arisen up and is casting from her the tokens of littleness

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<sup>168</sup> *DJ*, 9 Oct. 1905.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 Oct. 1905.

<sup>170</sup> Meehan, *Inver Parish in History*, p.241.

<sup>171</sup> *DJ*, 25 Oct. 1905.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 Nov. 1905.

and slavery.<sup>174</sup> There is no evidence that Bishop O'Donnell made any attempts to organise clubs and his role appears to have been primarily as patron although he was known to attend matches and present prizes after tournaments.<sup>175</sup> After 1906 however, both Bishop O'Donnell and the Very Reverend Dr Maguire's interest in the promotion of the GAA seems to have fallen dramatically.

Given their influence on society, this decline of clerical support was a significant blow to the GAA in Donegal in 1907. While Bishop O'Donnell was noted by one contemporary as 'doing wonders in the way of encouraging the promotion of Irish games in his diocese,' there is little evidence that he gave much support to the promotion of Gaelic games in Donegal after the Aonach an Dúin festival in July 1906, and as noted earlier, had sought to isolate the Gaelic League in the county.<sup>176</sup> The west county board also lost the influence of the Very Reverend Maguire who transferred to Letterkenny in 1906 to take up a new post as president of St Eunan's College. Members of the clergy such as the Very Reverend Maguire and Canon McFadden were not as vocal in their promotion of Gaelic games as they had been in 1905 and this may have reduced public awareness of the GAA in Donegal given the significance of the clergy within the Catholic community. The Very Reverend Dr Maguire's replacement as president of the west county board, the Reverend Hugh Gallagher, appears to have been more interested in athletic meetings and encouraged these at a meeting of the board in April 1907.<sup>177</sup>

Patronage was also received from those with less influence in society. Financial donations from administrators P.M. Gallagher and Peter Ward and the Mountcharles branch of Cumann na nGaedheal, who donated £3 towards the purchase of a trophy for Gaelic

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<sup>174</sup> *DJ*, 15 Nov. 1905.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 April and 18 July 1906.

<sup>176</sup> *Sport*, 31 Aug. 1907.

<sup>177</sup> *DJ*, 26 April 1907.

football, benefited the 1905 west county board.<sup>178</sup> Internal subscriptions were evidently necessary for the existence of a number of the 1905-7 clubs. It was decided in January 1906 that the Mountcharles Cumann na nGaedheal branch members would each contribute one shilling to their camán team's travelling expenses on a monthly basis.<sup>179</sup> The Ballybofey club noted the necessity of fees for the purchase of team kits at their founding meeting in May 1906.<sup>180</sup> Help also came from those sympathetic to clubs' ideals. Killygordon received a 'substantial subscription' from local bank official Patrick Paul McConnell while subscriptions to the value of £4 were also gathered by the club in January 1906.<sup>181</sup> Having a regular field was important as it meant the club had a base for practice and matches and most clubs in Donegal relied on local landowners to lend their property for the game.<sup>182</sup> An exception was the Tír Conaill GAA club, Fintown, who by 25 November 1905 had held their second practice 'in a field purchased by them from James Quinn, Meenmore.'<sup>183</sup> Attendance fees were evidently in use and the Sinn Féin, Bundoran club felt that admission fees were of a critical nature as 'expenses come rather heavily on a club, yet limited in numbers, so it is absolutely necessary that a nominal charge for admission should be made.'<sup>184</sup> Not everyone could be made to pay to watch, however, and the club complained after a match in December 1906 that 'the gate results were not at all in comparison with the huge crowd which assembled to witness the game.'<sup>185</sup> This had not improved by the following spring, when one reporter commented in a match preview that 'it is sad to see men going half a mile round looking for a chance to get in without paying' and readers were reminded that 'such a day's sport cannot be provided for nothing.'<sup>186</sup> The level of funding available to individual clubs

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<sup>178</sup>*DJ*, 25 Oct., 17 Nov. 1905 and 7 Feb. 1906.

<sup>179</sup>*Ibid.*, 26 Jan. 1906.

<sup>180</sup>*DI*, 18 May 1906.

<sup>181</sup>*DJ*, 22 Jan. 1906.

<sup>182</sup>*DP and DN*, 23 Dec. 1905, *DJ*, 22 Jan. 1906 and *DI*, 9 March 1906.

<sup>183</sup>*DP and DN*, 25 Nov. 1905.

<sup>184</sup>*DI*, 9 March 1906.

<sup>185</sup>*DV*, 7 Dec. 1906.

<sup>186</sup>*Ibid.*, 1 March 1907.

from the county board seems to have been minimal and Balldearg were grateful to receive support from the local drama club.<sup>187</sup> Affiliation fees were, of course necessary, with the entrance fee for clubs for the 1906 west Gaelic football league fixed at two shillings and six pence.<sup>188</sup> However, by June of the following year, it was decided that no entry fee would be necessary for this competition and this reflects the weak financial state of many clubs and the difficulty in attracting enough teams.<sup>189</sup>

### 1919-34

Obtaining playing fields in Donegal continued to be a significant problem. One GAA writer stated in 1923 that throughout the county ‘the principle difficulty to the formatting of clubs is the difficulty in securing suitable grounds.’<sup>190</sup> Certainly a lack of quality venues was evident. A GAA columnist claimed that in 1925 he had been ‘up and down through Tír Conaill, and I notice that good grounds and playing pitches are sadly lacking.’ He also stated that there were only two good grounds in the south and south-west, at Ballyshannon and Ardara, while in the east, only Ballybofey, Letterkenny, Newtowncunningham and Lifford were noteworthy. ‘All the others’ were said to be ‘poor in the extreme.’<sup>191</sup> By February 1925 the Young Tír Conaills club was in decline and were unable to procure a field for their match against Ardara.<sup>192</sup> The involvement of Brother Cassin and Brother Lucien was particularly important for the Ballyshannon club in the 1920s as they allowed matches to be played on the local Rock school field.<sup>193</sup> This overall state of affairs did little to encourage any improvement in the standard of play while the absence of regular, club-owned playing fields must have been detrimental to those with aspirations of strengthening their clubs given the importance of a fixed venue as a focal

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<sup>187</sup>*DV*, 15 Feb. 1907.

<sup>188</sup>*DP and DN*, 5 May 1906.

<sup>189</sup>*Ibid.*, 27 July 1907.

<sup>190</sup>*DD*, 15 June 1923.

<sup>191</sup>*Ibid.*, 6 Feb. 1925.

<sup>192</sup>*DP and DN*, 21 and 28 Feb. 1925.

<sup>193</sup>*Ibid.*, 8 Feb. 1924.



point for players, officials and supporters. Club houses also had to be obtained and at times, improvisation was necessary. After the death of Aodh Ruadh club member Patrick Daly of Ballyshannon in February 1932, it was noted that his house had regularly been used ‘as a club-room without ever a word of demur.’<sup>194</sup> The importance of those with social standing can be seen in local TDs Brian Brady and Micheal Óg McFadden’s participation in the Donegal GAA as their influence in the government led to the securing of training grounds at Finner Camp prior to the 1933 All Ireland junior final.<sup>195</sup>

While a revival in camán was briefly encouraged by the Reverend James J. Brennan of Inver in 1911, clerical activity in the Donegal GAA was sporadic in this decade and again in the 1920s and influence in the post-1919 county board was not as strong as in the first administrative body.<sup>196</sup> Certainly, the GAA in Ballyshannon was helped by the involvement of the aforementioned Brothers of the local school, Cassin and Lucien.<sup>197</sup> However, clerical involvement in the GAA in this period seems minimal. The formation of a junior championship was encouraged at a meeting of the county board in May 1928 by the Reverend J. Gallagher of Churchill who felt it would be a good recruiting ground for senior Gaelic football.<sup>198</sup>

By the early 1930s, the fact that some priests in Letterkenny were supporting rugby in the town was a source of concern to county board officials. At a meeting of the county board in March 1932 concerns were expressed about the playing of rugby at St Eunan’s College and it was stated that the town’s GAA clubs ‘had done all they could to put down rugby in

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<sup>194</sup>*DD*, 6 Feb. 1932.

<sup>195</sup>Donegal GAA Archives, Telegram from Michéal Óg McFadden to Seán Ó Caiside, 29 Sept. 1933. GAA/1/4/1 (7) (16).

<sup>196</sup>*DJ*, 7 July 1911.

<sup>197</sup>*Ibid.*, 17 Feb. 1928 and *DV*, 19 April 1930. In 1930, Brother Lucien was elected chairman of the county board after Michael Dawson withdrew.

<sup>198</sup>*DJ*, 18 May 1928.

the town, but now it appeared that it required action by the county board.<sup>199</sup> Two members of a local club visited the president of the college and the Bishop, but ‘got no satisfaction.’ Delegates felt that college students were being rendered illegal for Gaelic games due to their participation in rugby and that the former codes were not receiving enough attention from college staff. The promotion of rugby in Letterkenny was said to have been made worse by the fact that those organising it were ‘sons of Gaels, and people to whom they would naturally look for an ideal.’<sup>200</sup> TD and County Board delegate Brian Brady also expressed dissatisfaction on behalf of the GAA at a meeting of the Donegal Mental Hospital committee on 9 April 1933 that permission had been given for rugby to be played at the Mental Hospital grounds by the chairman Reverend John O’Doherty and that it was not discussed beforehand.<sup>201</sup> Brady got little support from those present, who included a number of priests, and it was agreed that ‘so long as there were no abuses, future similar games be allowed.’<sup>202</sup>

The value of the clergy in promoting sport did not go unnoticed by GAA members. One sympathiser wondered in 1933 in a letter to Seán Ó Caiside ‘could something not be done to interest the clergy generally with the association? They would be a great asset.’<sup>203</sup> At this point it appears there was no widespread support from the clergy for the GAA in Donegal, and the rhetoric and activity of those involved in the first county board had been replaced by sporadic involvement, at club and county board level. However, their efforts in the initial Association was not forgotten and the County Donegal championship was renamed the Dr Maguire Memorial cup in 1926 after the former president while the Cardinal O’Donnell cup was revived for hurling purposes in the early 1930s.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>199</sup>*DP and DN*, 16 April 1932.

<sup>200</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>201</sup>*DJ*, 13 April 1932.

<sup>202</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>203</sup>Donegal GAA Archives, Letter from P.J. O’Hare to Seán Ó Caiside, 10 April 1933. GAA 1/4/1 (2) (2).

<sup>204</sup>*DJ*, 21 Aug. 1926 and 1 Dec. 1933.

Like soccer, the development of the GAA in the 1920s also required financial assistance and many clubs experienced monetary problems. The weak financial state of clubs was not helped by the financial difficulties experienced by the Ulster Council, which was forced to pay an entertainment tax to the British government, whereas after 1927, GAA teams in the Free State were exempt from paying fees of this kind.<sup>205</sup> Dónal McAnallen believes that much of the poor financial state of the Ulster Council was down to the fact that Eoin O'Duffy, the honorary treasurer from 1925 until 1934, was residing in Dublin and too far away to organise accounts properly and while attendances were decreasing, the Council did not deal with business affairs carefully enough. It was not until 1934, with the election of Gerry Arthurs as secretary, that the Ulster Council began to manage these matters in a more efficient way.<sup>206</sup> Many Donegal GAA clubs in the period from 1919 until 1934 suffered from a failure to consistently organise and put these practices into place. A major exception was the Aodh Ruadh club in Ballyshannon who, with a strong infrastructure, were instrumental in keeping Gaelic games alive in this area. Their members were heavily involved, not only at club level but in the county board and as stated, they benefited from the involvement of those who had previous experience of organising sport. Unlike the vast majority of GAA clubs in Donegal at the time, they offered both hurling and Gaelic football teams and an increase in club membership was noted from seventy-six in 1924 to 121 in 1926.<sup>207</sup> They were, for most of the decade, able to secure a playing field and ensured that their activities were well publicised in the local press with club official Brother Cassin providing a regular column in the *Donegal Democrat* prior his transferral to Dundalk in 1928.<sup>208</sup>

The club were relatively stable financially and their officials' dedication meant that lulls in activity did not last for very long. They also attracted support from a wide section of

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<sup>205</sup> De Burca, *The GAA: A History*, p.138.

<sup>206</sup> McAnallen, 'Cén Fath a Raibh Cúige Uladh Chomh Lag Chomh Fada Sin?', p.149.

<sup>207</sup> *DP and TN*, 29 May 1926.

<sup>208</sup> *DJ*, 17 Feb. 1928.

the local nationalist community and in January 1930 could boast of the involvement of members of the local clergy, Garda Síochána, the National Bank and a number of national school teachers.<sup>209</sup> In 1931 it was stated that their annual Christmas social was ‘one of the principle attractions’ in the town’s festive activities, having been organised ‘each year for twenty years without a break in continuity.’<sup>210</sup> The club managed to come up with new ideas to keep things going and invited local businessmen and professionals to take up membership in May 1933.<sup>211</sup> They were also the only Donegal club to organise a celebratory event for the GAA’s golden jubilee in 1934.<sup>212</sup> This perseverance and ability to consistently organise events in the community was in contrast to many clubs in Donegal.

Financial difficulty amongst GAA clubs was a recurring theme throughout the county and public appeals for financial support were crucial for the survival of many in the 1920s and early 1930s. As noted earlier, the organisation of Gaelic Sports Days, whist drives, ceilís (Irish dancing) and subscriptions were a necessity for most clubs’ survival. The Donegal county board felt it necessary to appeal for financial assistance in March 1924. It was reported that

As matters stand the local clubs are finding it hard to exist. Of the 21 clubs in the county the majority can only find financial assistance to keep them going in fits and starts. The cause of this is—each club draws its meagre support from its playing members only. The public up to the present has evinced no interest in the clubs’ success or failure.<sup>213</sup>

It was also stated that clubs were unable to contribute to the county board and delegates had to pay for their own transport to attend county board meetings.<sup>214</sup> Even the purchasing of trophies required external patronage. In August 1926, the county board launched what turned out to be a

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<sup>209</sup>*DD*, 25 Jan. 1930.

<sup>210</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 Jan. 1931.

<sup>211</sup>*Ibid.*, 27 May 1933.

<sup>212</sup>*Ibid.*, 30 June 1934.

<sup>213</sup>*Ibid.*, 28 March 1924.

<sup>214</sup>*Ibid.*,

successful appeal for subscriptions to the Dr Maguire cup fund in the local press while they also benefited from the donation of cups from local newspapers towards the end of the decade.<sup>215</sup>

This financial difficulty differed vastly from Cavan, where one writer illustrated the strength of the sport in this county in an article after they heavily defeated Donegal in 1926:

Cavan is the home of Gaelic football. There the game has been reduced to a fine art as practically no other football has been known in the county for upwards of forty years. Cavan county people spare no expense in promoting the game and almost every small town in County Cavan sends an annual subscription to the Cavan county board. Last season the small village of Bawnboy alone sent £25, and the same village boasts of a local team for the past 36 years...in Donegal it is quite different.<sup>216</sup>

Cavan were certainly in a different league to Donegal, not just from a Gaelic football standard but also financially. While the Donegal county board continuously struggled with finance and organisation, at the beginning of 1929 Cavan were reported to be one of the strongest GAA counties in Ireland and had spent £140 during the past year on developing their county ground, Breffni Park.<sup>217</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that the GAA in Donegal owned any playing fields at this point. Cavan was also located more centrally within Ireland, lying in the south of Ulster and nearer to the centre of the Ulster Council in Clones and the Central Council in Dublin, and transport to these areas was undoubtedly easier than from Donegal. The terrain also differed, with few mountains and little isolation from these centres of GAA activity.

Lack of support particularly affected the development of GAA clubs in the east. A general lack of interest in Gaelic games in Letterkenny was certainly a problem. One GAA reporter was scathing in his criticism of the limited local support at the Donegal versus

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<sup>215</sup>*DD*, 16 April and 21 Aug. 1926.

<sup>216</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 April 1926.

<sup>217</sup>*DP and TN*, 9 Feb. 1929.

Tyrone Ulster championship match held there in 1924.<sup>218</sup> The following year a correspondent claimed that ‘Letterkenny may excel in many of our county institutions, but for a goodly number of years back, its reputation as a GAA stronghold is not up to the mark’, although he did think it was recovering.<sup>219</sup> However, this problem continued into the 1930s. At the club’s AGM on 21 February 1934, it was noted that ‘the home gate receipts did not come up to expectations.’<sup>220</sup> At the eastern board convention on 14 January 1934, outgoing secretary Leo McCarron gave a rather pessimistic account of the division’s progress. He stated that while the other divisions were doing fine financially, he could not say the same about his own area. He felt that although they had ‘as many senior clubs as the other parts of the county put together, this did not by any means imply they were in a stronger position. As a matter of fact, although there were nine senior teams, he did not think there was a real club anywhere.’<sup>221</sup> McCarron added that ‘it was a matter of a few enthusiastic Gaels helping to carry on a team’ and complained that there was basically too much talk and not enough action being taken. Many clubs were unable to pay gate levies to the county board as ‘some of the gates hardly realised the amount of the levy.’ Other administrative problems included a failure of appointed referees to turn up for matches, with the result that spectators lost interest. Fixtures in the county championship for the area had not been completed and McCarron even went as far as to say that ‘the people of the area have become absolutely denationalised.’<sup>222</sup> This, he felt, was centred in their location, claiming that ‘they were in the middle of a planters’ area.’<sup>223</sup> He later went on to state that ‘there was a large number of people in Letterkenny who would take no part in any Sunday games.’<sup>224</sup> Certainly there may have been a larger non-Catholic population in the east than in areas such as the south-west

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<sup>218</sup>*DV*, 24 May 1924.

<sup>219</sup>*DJ*, 17 June 1925.

<sup>220</sup>*Ibid.*, 23 Feb. 1934.

<sup>221</sup>*Ibid.*, 19 Jan. 1934.

<sup>222</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>223</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>224</sup>*DD*, 3 Feb. 1934.

with the result that Gaelic games organisers did not have a monopoly on choices of sport such as in the south-west. Cricket, soccer and rugby clubs were in operation in the early 1930s in East Donegal and added to this, attracting interest in the GAA appears to have been difficult for some clubs. One Ballybofey delegate complained at the Annual Convention in January 1934 that for five home matches in 1933 they had received an average of only five shillings at the gate per game which was said to be a poor return.<sup>225</sup>

An improvement in levels of commitment was noted at the board's annual convention on 6 December 1934 where it was noted that matches were 'well played in a sporting spirit, the standard of competition improved, [and] all competitions were completed.'<sup>226</sup> This was, it was stated, because 'Gaels faced these difficulties with determination and very quickly it had become evident that a new era had been born...enthusiasm was renewed.'<sup>227</sup> This may be an oversimplification of matters as problems still dogged the organisation of clubs but it was certainly an improvement. In 1933, gate receipts at club and intra-divisional matches in Donegal amounted to a record sum of £203 12 shillings and 2½d. A training grant was also received from the Ulster Council with the financial report 'very satisfactory.'<sup>228</sup> By January 1934 the Donegal county board had managed to clear its debt and treasurer, Seán Conaghan stated that 'gates were good, enthusiasm had never been so widespread, and support from the public had never been more generous.'<sup>229</sup> This credit balance of £93 18 shillings and 6d, including a debt of £45 16 shillings due from the Ulster Council, was helped by a successful public appeal prior to the All-Ireland junior Gaelic football final, and despite Donegal's defeat, this run and appearance at Croke Park no doubt gave the GAA in the county a much needed morale boost. More care also appears to have been taken in regard to financial matters, with itemised reports being submitted

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<sup>225</sup> *DD*, 3 Feb. 1934.

<sup>226</sup> *DJ*, 7 Dec. 1934.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 Jan. 1934.

and an auditor used to clarify matters. Much of this changeover was said to be due to the work of chairman Seán Ó Caiside who was praised for his successful ‘endeavour to clear up the financial mess they were in.’<sup>230</sup> Interestingly, it was also noted that amongst the subscribers ‘included the names of a number of Protestants and Unionists from the county, and also the names of a number of former residents of Donegal, now in Dublin and elsewhere.’<sup>231</sup> This reflects an increase in popular support for Gaelic games in the county at this point, while political involvement had also improved with TD Brian Brady donating a record £8 1 shilling.<sup>232</sup> Funds were boosted by a number of those with Donegal links residing in Dublin prior to the 1933 All-Ireland junior final through the organisation of a committee and appeal in support of Donegal and a reception for the team was arranged.<sup>233</sup> Clearly the GAA in Donegal was now attracting increased support from those with influence within and outside of the county and others sympathetic to the GAA there, something which had been lacking since the early 1920s after the decline of involvement of the 1919 county board founders. This was crucial in putting the Association on a firm footing in the county.

## **V: Spectators**

### **1888-92**

As Hunt has noted, drawing up a socio-occupational account of spectators is difficult without casualty lists such as those used by Garnham, Mason and Tranter in their work on crowds.<sup>234</sup> Like in Westmeath, there were no major casualties at Donegal sporting events in the period covered here and emphasis will instead be placed on the behaviour of crowds in this section. Tranter has shown that in Stirling, crowd disturbances actually decreased in the

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<sup>230</sup>DD, 3 Feb. 1934.

<sup>231</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>232</sup>DD, 3 Feb. 1934.

<sup>233</sup>Donegal GAA Archives, Letter from Seán Bonner to Seán Ó Caiside, 4 Oct. 1933. GAA/1/4/1/(8) (3)

<sup>234</sup>Hunt, *Sport and Society*, p.218. See Neal Garnham, *Association Football and Society in Pre-partition Ireland* (Belfast, 2004), pp 115-7; Neil Tranter, ‘The Cappielow Riot and the Composition and Behaviour of Soccer Crowds in Late Victorian Scotland’ in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1995), pp 124-40, p.130 and Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915* (Brighton, 1980) pp 155-7.



last decade of the nineteenth century and this supports the views of Mason and Crump that the problem was smaller and less common in Britain than Dunning, Hutchinson and Vamplew have claimed.<sup>235</sup> In comparison with incidents in Glasgow, Cappielow and Belfast, GAA matches contained scarce evidence of crowd disorder which led to major casualties. The sectarian nature of crowds has been identified as a cause of disruption at soccer matches in Belfast by Garnham.<sup>236</sup> GAA matches, with their nationalist links, were generally free from attracting support divided along religious or political lines. However, this does not mean that behaviour at GAA matches was always exemplary.

Drunkenness at matches was commonplace in the early GAA and this aroused clerical anger.<sup>237</sup> There are a number of references in the local press which illustrate that GAA administrators were also anxious to show that they could host a sports event without any trouble. The *Derry Journal* GAA correspondents were eager to portray a peaceful atmosphere at their matches to show that these men were capable of organising Gaelic games in a civilised manner.<sup>238</sup> As Mike Cronin has noted, negative constructions of the Irish race were widespread during the Victorian era in British journals with *The London Illustrated News* and *Punch* eager to portray the Irish as showing 'a tendency to violence, a lack of respect for the law, laziness and drunkenness.'<sup>239</sup> After Burt Hibernians' defeat of St Columb's in the Derry hurling championship in January 1889, it was noted that 'not a hitch of any description took place to mar the day's proceedings. Shortly after four o'clock, the games being over, the large concourse of people quietly dispersed, and in a few minutes Springtown resumed its normal

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<sup>235</sup>Tranter, 'The Cappielow Riot', p.130. See Wray Vamplew, 'Sports Crowd Disorder in Britain, 1870-1914: Causes and Controls' in *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1980), pp 5-20; John Hutchinson, 'Some Aspects of Football Crowds before 1914', paper presented to the Society for the Study of Labour History, University of Sussex, 1975; Eric Dunning, J.A. Maguire, Patrick Murphy and John Williams, 'The Social Roots of Football Violence' in *Leisure Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1982) pp 139-56; Jeremy Crump and Tony Mason, 'Hostile and Improper Demonstrations: Football Violence 1880-1980' in *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, no. 50 (1985), pp 11-2.

<sup>236</sup>Garnham, *Association Football and Society*, p.129.

<sup>237</sup>Hunt, 'Parish Factions, Parading Bands and Sumptuous Repasts', pp 95-6.

<sup>238</sup>Con Short, *The Ulster GAA Story* (Rossan, 1984), p. 31.

<sup>239</sup>Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism*, p.109.

quietness.’<sup>240</sup> Two months later, when the clubs of Young Ireland, St Columb’s and Bright Stars came to Buncrana to on St Patrick’s Day, similar sentiments were expressed by the reporter.<sup>241</sup>

However, not every event went according to plan and at times spectators proved difficult to manage. After the Christmas tournament at Springtown, County Derry, in December 1889 the failure of supporters and players to control themselves was noted. It was claimed that ‘there were two great drawbacks to the tournament, viz-the rough play indulged in by one or two teams, and the manner in which the spectators crowded in on the field in spite of the energetic and hard-working committee.’<sup>242</sup> The interventions of supporters could sometimes interfere with the standard of play. After Buncrana Emmets had defeated Cahir O’s in April 1890, it was claimed that ‘the Cahirs’ difficulties were augmented by the conduct of the spectators, who in their anxiety to witness the game, mingled freely with the players.’<sup>243</sup> Without proper enclosures crowd control was obviously difficult for these clubs. After the Derry GAA tournament on 1 November 1890, club members were thanked ‘for assisting to keep the spectators outside the touchlines, which task was no easy one.’<sup>244</sup> The county committee were also advised ‘to get a wire around the field’ to prevent this occurring again.<sup>245</sup> It is clear that organising tournaments and matches at this time was not always an easy task and the impatience and excitement of spectators added to this.

Musical entertainment also provided an important part of the match-day’s entertainment and was normally an anticipated part of proceedings. At the Derry GAA Christmas tournament in 1888, ‘several bands marched to the grounds, bringing contingents’ but it was noted that no musical performance took place at the match, much to the

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<sup>240</sup>*DJ*, 28 Jan. 1889.

<sup>241</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 March 1889.

<sup>242</sup>*Sport*, 4 Jan. 1890.

<sup>243</sup>*DJ*, 9 April 1890.

<sup>244</sup>*Ibid.*, 5 Nov. 1890.

<sup>245</sup>*DJ*, 5 Nov. 1890.

disappointment of the reporter.<sup>246</sup> The Fahan flute band entertained spectators during a match in December 1892 and the acquisition of a band was often an important part of the day's events.<sup>247</sup> On Easter Monday 1893, the teams of Burt Hibernians and St Patrick's 'marched to the Waterside, accompanied by the St Patrick's Flute Band, where the Burt team were hospitably entertained' by the home team.<sup>248</sup> This marching and musical performance was an exhibition of their nationalist identity while the post-match entertainment illustrates the friendly relations between most Derry and Donegal GAA clubs. While the excursions of a number of Derry teams have been well documented, there is no evidence that Donegal clubs travelled to other counties outside of Derry for matches, perhaps due to the financial costs involved and lack of IRB involvement.<sup>249</sup> Cahir O's were the hosts for an enjoyable trip for the Derry clubs of Young Ireland, St Columb's and Bright Stars on St Patrick's Day 1889. Having left early in the morning, these clubs were able to avail of ten o' clock mass in Cockhill which illustrates the strong Catholic ethos in the GAA.<sup>250</sup>

## 1905-7

Transport improvements meant that more people could travel to matches by the early twentieth century and GAA writers continued to portray a positive Gaelic atmosphere in their match reports. At a camán match between Donegal and Derry at Burt in August 1905, the reporter was eager to accentuate the benefits of playing traditional Irish games and the spirit which came with this when he reported that

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<sup>246</sup>*DJ*, 28 Dec. 1888.

<sup>247</sup>*Ibid.*, 2 Jan. 1893.

<sup>248</sup>*Ibid.*, 10 April 1893.

<sup>249</sup>Leo Deery and Danny O'Kane (eds.), *Doire: A History of the GAA in Derry 1884-1984* (Coleraine, 1984), p.13.

<sup>250</sup>*DJ*, 20 March 1889.

On arrival at the field the Derry visitors were received by the assembled crowds with a hearty céad míle fáilte. Among those to offer a kindly greeting stood the venerable “king of Burt”, a Newtonian looking representative of a bye-gone period, but still hale and hearty, affording evidence in his own person of the value of that physical training which camán playing can give the young Irishman...The playing ground presented a bright and lively appearance as the young ladies from the surrounding locality patronised the occasion by assembling in large numbers, while the young men from the countryside around seemed to have all their attention focused on witnessing the main event. Gaels on cycles from Strabane were also present.<sup>251</sup>

Following the match, the Derry team returned home by cars, ‘the singing of national songs being maintained with vigour and enthusiasm until Waterloo Place was reached.’<sup>252</sup> Cars were also used to transport Balldearg players in 1906 and it appears that at this point transport within the county was beginning to improve-Newtowncunningham Harps availed of a wagonette to travel to away matches.<sup>253</sup> However, there were still no widespread attempts to organise trains to matches and arrangements for excursions to the Grand Camán parade in October 1905 and the camán championship final in July 1906 at Letterkenny appear to have been a rarity.<sup>254</sup> It is difficult to be accurate about crowd figures at this time. One reporter estimated that there were almost 2,000 spectators present in Gweedore for the local team’s Gaelic football clash against Lámh Dearg of Letterkenny in April 1906, while there were ‘hundreds of spectators’ at the West Donegal camán final replay three months later.<sup>255</sup> Unsurprisingly, poor weather could affect the turnout given that venues generally amounted to little more than a field and there were no proper stands or covering at this stage. The small

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<sup>251</sup>*DP and DN*, 19 Aug. 1905.

<sup>252</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>253</sup>*LS*, 3 May 1906, *DP and DN*, 4 Nov. 1905 and *DJ*, 13 April 1906.

<sup>254</sup>*DJ*, 9 Oct. 1905 and 16 July 1906.

<sup>255</sup>*Ibid.*, 27 April 1906 and *DI*, 13 July 1906.

attendance at the Gaelic Athletic tournament at the Asylum grounds in Letterkenny on Easter Monday 1906 was probably due to the ‘very unfavourable’ weather conditions.’<sup>256</sup>

### 1919-34

Even after the re-founding of the county board in 1919, attracting interest in Gaelic football was not as straightforward as hoped. In November 1919 the editor of the *Donegal Democrat* outlined a number of problems with arrangements. He felt that ‘there is room for improvement in the organisation of individual clubs. It is quite a usual occurrence to see referee, linesman and umpires being appointed just when the match is about to start.’<sup>257</sup> More practice was advised while interference of spectators was also a problem and rough play and poor punctuality were also condemned. On a positive note, it was noted that ‘lack of travelling facilities always proved a stumbling block’ but ‘that state of affairs no longer happily exists-no thanks due to the railway companies.’<sup>258</sup> This was debatable as teams frequently appeared late for matches and the majority of trains catered only for more significant matches such as inter-county clashes or county championship finals. Poor timekeeping on the part of teams also tended to irritate spectators. A match between Pettigo and Bundoran in August 1921 was an hour late in starting because of ‘some motor troubles’ and ‘numbers left the ground, despairing of the visitors turning up.’<sup>259</sup> The reporter present at a benefit match for the county board the following month between Bundoran and East Donegal selections felt that ‘unpunctuality... seems to be the bane of Gaelic teams-this match starting one hour behind time.’<sup>260</sup> This was still a problem towards the middle of the decade. In 1924 one reporter complained that the Tyrone versus Donegal match in Letterkenny ‘started very late. They [Donegal] arrived half an hour late and quite ignored the

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<sup>256</sup> *DJ*, 18 April 1906.

<sup>257</sup> *DD*, 14 Nov. 1919.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 Aug. 1921.

<sup>260</sup> *DD*, 9 Sept. 1921.

referee's whistle for twenty minutes and more...it is an insult to spectators to bring them to a field and charge them a shilling for looking at players clustered in a corner debating something or nothing.<sup>261</sup>

The paying of admission fees continued to be a problem and could not, in many cases, be enforced without proper enclosures and the majority of clubs were unable to erect these. There are numerous references in the local press at this time to spectators not paying to watch matches.<sup>262</sup> Poor attendances were particularly evident in these early years of the new county board. The crowd at the Bundoran-Donegal town match in November 1921 was said to be 'the smallest that had ever assembled to witness a league competition' while the attendance at the Killybegs -Glenties match a year later was 'rather poor.'<sup>263</sup> The reporter was at a loss to figure out why this was so, but recorded that 'possibly the game is not sufficiently varied or outstanding enough. Players should strive to combine hand and foot and otherwise show off the game to better advantage.'<sup>264</sup> A lack of new clubs in the area, 'with too much sameness in the recurring Killybegs-Ardara-Glenties' fixtures was also suggested as being detrimental to interest levels at this time.

Attendances improved later in the decade as the GAA became more widely recognised within society. As noted in the previous chapter, the GAA was well publicised in the local press and the securing of trains for county finals and inter-county matches eased transport difficulties with these generally being held in centralised urban areas. The organisation of adequate transport was crucial to success, and when this was neglected, attendances at matches such as the Antrim versus Donegal Ulster hurling championship at

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<sup>261</sup> *DV*, 24 May 1924.

<sup>262</sup> See for example, *DP and DN*, 26 April, 1924, *DD*, 13 Feb. and 10 Oct. 1925.

<sup>263</sup> *DD*, 25 Nov. 1921 and *DJ*, 24 Nov. 1922.

<sup>264</sup> *DJ*, 24 Nov. 1921.

Letterkenny in October 1928 suffered.<sup>265</sup> As the 1920s wore on, county finals became the showpiece of club Gaelic football and gate receipts were generally good for these fixtures. While a replay of the 1920 final attracted only 400 spectators, support increased throughout the decade.<sup>266</sup> By 1923 trains were being arranged with a special train put on for the final in Glenties.<sup>267</sup> The following year, ‘trains and motor cars must have brought at least a thousand people’ to Letterkenny for the decider.<sup>268</sup> The 1928 county final held in Glenties drew a crowd which paid ‘gate receipts of over £60.’<sup>269</sup> This was no doubt helped by the fact that ‘many enthusiastic supporters availed of the special railway facilities on the Donegal line, while buses and motors brought in many from a distance.’<sup>270</sup> As Cronin, Rouse and Duncan have noted, by the mid-1920s motor cars were becoming an important mode of transport to matches with car ownership growing in the following decades, while bicycles and trains also helped players, officials and supporters in their quest to attend matches.<sup>271</sup>

Popular support for Gaelic games in areas such as Ballyshannon meant that excursion trains were being regularly put on for inter-county matches by the middle of the decade. Excitement was built up with sensationalist previews such as the following for the Donegal-Cavan Ulster Gaelic football championship clash in 1926:

The excursion to Cavan on Sunday next will be a large one. Ballyshannon and wife, Bundoran and wife and perhaps Belleek and wife are all going not to speak of all that will come from Donegal, Letterkenny and “down the line.” The fare is low, 5s.- and the game promises to be so thrilling that everyone is interested. Anyhow, at the time, the Slashers’ town is worth a visit.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> *DJ*, 13 Oct. 1928.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 March 1920.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 April, 1923.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 June 1924.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 May 1928.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>271</sup> Cronin, Rouse and Duncan, *The GAA: A People’s History*, pp 77-106.

<sup>272</sup> *DD*, 15 May 1926.

Crowd figures at McKenna Cup matches earlier that year illustrate the popular support inter-county matches were able to attract. Approximately 8,000 were said to have attended the Donegal-Tyrone clash in February while ‘about 6,000’ attended the replay.<sup>273</sup> The 1927 McKenna Cup final between Donegal and Monaghan at Clones drew receipts of £90.<sup>274</sup> These matches were a big day out for many supporters. The GAA’s popular appeal grew in these decades and the National League, organised in 1926, added to the media profile of these games. By the end of this decade, the attendance at the All Ireland Gaelic football final had reached over 30,000.<sup>275</sup> The hosting of matches also boosted revenue within local towns and after a Donegal versus Armagh match Ulster championship at Ballyshannon in June 1928, it was noted that ‘it was really heartening to see the crowds, and it brought a little badly needed cash into the town.’<sup>276</sup>

However, it would be incorrect to assume that everything went smoothly. De Burca has stated that ‘some of the crowds and gate money from 1925 onwards concealed a widespread tendency to endure mediocrity in the running of clubs, boards and councils.’<sup>277</sup> In Donegal things were no different. Despite the increase in the number of cups available towards the end of the decade and improvements in transport for finals and inter-county matches, problems remained. While the county championship final was developing as an important occasion within Donegal society, the 1925 final between Aodh Ruadh, Ballyshannon and Dunfanaghy did not take place as the former club refused to travel, citing illness in their team. A scratch match was hastily arranged although Kilcar were later awarded the title.<sup>278</sup> In 1929, the refusal of the Killygordon captain and his team, a few moments prior to the final’s throw-in, to play on the pitch in Glenties undoubtedly tarnished

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<sup>273</sup>DD, 12 March and 19 March 1926.

<sup>274</sup>Ibid., 14 May 1927.

<sup>275</sup>Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: A People’s History*, p.50.

<sup>276</sup>DV, 16 June 1928.

<sup>277</sup>De Burca, *The GAA: A History*, p.135.

<sup>278</sup>DJ, 3 July 1925.



the image of the GAA in the county.<sup>279</sup> Chairman Seán Ó Caiside later spoke of his humiliation having been forced to refund angry supporters the £39 gathered at the entrance.<sup>280</sup> This final was not resolved until the summer of 1930 after a number of protests resulted in Ballyshannon finally gaining victory.<sup>281</sup> However, by 1934 the structure of Gaelic games in Donegal, with its weekly matches and regular press coverage, far outweighed anything that any other sport in the county could offer and the GAA had made a substantial improvement since the early 1920s. More significantly, it was there to stay.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown the significance of those with local social influence and experience of administrative work in the development of the GAA in Donegal. In addition to poor organisation, it was the failure to gain sufficient popular support and, in turn, adequate financing, which ensured that Gaelic football remained a minority sport in the county until the 1920s, while hurling failed to capture the public's attention outside of a handful of areas. By 1934, the GAA had established itself in Donegal and was much more of a social movement than it had been in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although the extent to which the Association was integrated into society varied and did not always remain permanent in some parishes. Gaelic football had become a regular social outlet in many parts of the county and improvements at national level, particularly in regard to inter-county competitions, boosted interest in this sport.

The development of the GAA in Donegal was generally marked by a distinct inconsistency of political involvement, as while politics did lead to the foundation of clubs in some areas, this was not reflected throughout the county. While both the 1905 and 1919

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<sup>279</sup> *DD*, 12 Oct. 1929.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 Oct. 1929,

<sup>281</sup> *DD*, 2 Aug. 1930.

county boards did initially have strong political ties, in both cases this quickly declined.

Tadhg Ó hAnnrachain's statement in relation to the GAA Central Council that 'the passionate belief of the importance of its activity was a factor in motivating the leadership of the late 1920s and 1930s' could equally be applied to those organising the GAA in Donegal and was more a factor in the spread of the Association in the county than any political force.<sup>282</sup>

Donegal's early GAA clubs lacked the militant attitudes later shown by a number of those in the 1905-7 period. Similarly their off-field activities lacked the ambition, which came with affluence, of those in Dublin and Belfast in the late nineteenth century who were in a position to participate in 'cultural tourism.'<sup>283</sup> As seen in the 1920s in the case of Aodh Ruadh, Ballyshannon, GAA clubs provided a recreational and social outlet for members of the community while matches provided young men with the opportunity to participate in team games and thus improve their well-being. This developing of the GAA club as a focal point in the community appears to have been a much later trend than in some other counties.<sup>284</sup>

The socio-occupational background of players was shown to be drawn mainly from the agricultural sector, reflecting the findings of Hunt and McElligott. Until research can be undertaken on those participating in the 1919-1934 period, it is unclear whether those employed in other categories of work became more prominent as players in the GAA in Donegal. What is clear is that GAA players were mainly based in the agricultural sector, were mainly Roman Catholic and single. While soccer attracted more players from other Christian religious denominations, the main difference was that there was less involvement as players of the agricultural class in soccer and more from those categorised as industrially employed. Priests and national school teachers also appear to have favoured roles in organising Gaelic games over soccer administration, where officials were found to be mainly involved in

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<sup>282</sup> Ó hAnnrachain, 'The Heroic Importance of Sport', p.1336.

<sup>283</sup> Hunt, 'Parish Factions, Parading Bands and Sumptuous Repasts', pp 88-97.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.,

industrial work. Involvement of national school teachers and members of the Garda Síochána was particularly significant for the development of the GAA in Donegal in the 1920s and into the 1930s and reflects more widespread trends. The loss of support of the clergy in 1906 meant that the involvement of one of Irish society's most socially influential sectors remained on the periphery of the Association in Donegal and participation was generally restricted to those involved individually at club level. Similarly the involvement of elected politicians within the Donegal GAA was marked by inconsistency and this was also a disadvantage. As a result of low levels of finance, clubs relied on fundraising events such as concerts, ceilís, whist drives and annual sports to make ends meet. While Donegal could never be said to be truly united in sporting purposes, the importance of inter-county matches and county finals grew by the mid-1920s and improved transport meant that supporters could travel to matches with greater ease, locally, provincially and nationally. This was one of the major transformations within the GAA in Donegal in that the level of support and interest in Gaelic games grew from being restricted to an isolated area in the north-east to more widespread areas around the county.

This chapter has again illustrated the slow evolution of sport in a peripheral Irish area and has illustrated the danger of placing too much emphasis on the linkage between the growth of the GAA and nationalist politics. As can be seen throughout this thesis, the spread of the GAA was not a widescale development and rates of growth varied. The failure of the Association as a social phenomenon within the county for a large part of the Association's first fifty years has shown that more examination of regional trends needs to be undertaken in any assessment of the GAA's strengths and weaknesses.

## Conclusion

This thesis is centred around three key themes. Firstly, it has shown how sports develop in a geographically peripheral area. The development of the GAA in Donegal was neglected by provincial and national governing bodies for much of the period covered here and as a result its eventual success relied on the agency of a small group of local men for administration. Secondly it illustrates the incompleteness of the Irish sporting ‘revolution.’ It is clear that sport in Donegal simply could not develop at the same rates of growth of those in many parts of England and in some areas of Ireland. Thirdly and also of key significance to this thesis, is that the development of the GAA was rather mundane and had less to do with political identity than has been presumed previously by a number of GAA historians and writers. This new understanding of how the GAA worked in a rural setting challenges the macro-argument of politics and identity made by Mandle and De Burca, and has shown that nationalist politics was only minimal in the GAA’s development in Donegal.<sup>1</sup> Richard Holt’s assertion that ‘the formation and early history of the GAA is arguably the most striking instance of politics shaping sport in modern history’ may also be challenged in regard to its development at a micro-level in Donegal.<sup>2</sup> Evidently, local conditions varied and this should be taken into consideration in any study of how the GAA spread throughout the country, rather than its development being seen as a uniform movement which was accepted in all counties and at the same rates of growth.

Given the lack of political involvement in the development of the GAA in Donegal, one would also have to ask the question, despite Catholics replacing Protestants as the dominant social force in the early twentieth century, just how politically nationalist was Donegal society? Certainly its location meant that it was somewhat removed from events in

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus De Burca, *The GAA: A History* [Second edition] (Dublin, 2000) and W.F. Mandle, *The Gaelic Athletic Association and Irish Nationalist Politics* (London, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford, 1989), p.238.

more southern areas which were central to Ireland's struggle for independence. In particular, East Donegal had a large Protestant population and remained very much part of Ulster in outlook. As noted earlier, Desmond Murphy has stated that low levels of political consciousness existed in Donegal until the Truce.<sup>3</sup> While election results do illustrate a large amount of support for nationalist parties, as has been seen in this thesis, for long periods the GAA in Donegal lacked the involvement of, or a cross-over with politicians and the participation of those in political parties such as Sinn Féin was sporadic and varied.<sup>4</sup> This contrasted to Kerry where McElligott has stated that key events in the rise of nationalist support such as the Cultural Revival boosted the GAA's development.<sup>5</sup>

The development of the GAA in Donegal suffered not only from a lack of popular support but also a lack of political involvement and its evolution was much slower as a result. Support for more militant forms of nationalism were certainly weaker than elsewhere and the power of Bishop O'Donnell, and his support for the Irish Parliamentary Party, meant that militant groups such as Cumann na nGaedheal failed to have any impact. Even taking the rise of support for Sinn Féin in the 1918 election and the decline of the IPP into account, this did not mean that support for the GAA was going to mushroom throughout the county, as the Association still needed local organisers to get the movement up and running. As shown in chapter six, it was only in the south and east where Sinn Féin involvement in GAA clubs took affect in 1919. Added to this, support for this party declined at this time in Donegal.

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<sup>3</sup> Desmond Murphy, *Derry, Donegal and Modern Ulster 1790-1921* (Derry, 1981), pp 261-2.

<sup>4</sup> See B.M. Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), pp 339-87 and *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland 1918-92: Irish Elections to Parliaments and Parliamentary Assemblies at Westminster, Belfast, Dublin, Strasbourg* (Dublin, 1992), pp 101-33.

<sup>5</sup> Richard McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom: The Establishment and Development of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Kerry, 1884-1924,' unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University College Dublin, 2011, pp 273-4.

While the role, and propagation of, nationalism in the development of the GAA has been well examined, the topic lacks the type of research carried out by John Bale in his 1986 article, 'Sport and National Identity: A Geographical View.'<sup>6</sup> Through his construction of 'images or mental maps of the regional geography of certain sports', Bale has highlighted areas within Britain which are perceived to be associated with cricket, rugby, golf and soccer and has looked at the media's role in the formation of 'sport-place images' as well as examining continental patterns.<sup>7</sup> Certainly some assessment of regional variations in sport throughout Ireland has been offered, such as Kevin Whelan's assessment of hurling areas, but does that make these regions any more nationalist than places where this Irish game is not played? As an assessment based on the construction of mental-maps of Irish sport and areas with the greatest concentration of clubs and successful teams is unavailable, it is difficult to define how 'nationalist' any Irish region or area is in sporting terms. In fact Bale has stated that 'nations are aggregates of regions; truly national sports may be a myth.'<sup>8</sup> It is safe to say, however, that some GAA areas are more renowned for their 'nationalist' sporting links within Ireland than others. Crossmaglen, County Armagh, for example, would today be regarded as a hot-bed of GAA activity, a legacy of the Troubles perhaps, while Raphoe, County Donegal, with its local hockey club and lack of GAA teams, would not be seen as a facilitator of the spread of Ireland's 'national games.'

As Mike Cronin has shown, the definition of nationalism was ever-changing and 'in the revolutionary period...nationalism was at the centre of Irish life but it was as multifaceted and intangible as it has ever been.'<sup>9</sup> If the involvement of GAA men in the struggle to gain Irish independence in the opening decades of the twentieth century can be gauged as having

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<sup>6</sup> John Bale, 'Sport and National Identity: A Geographical View' in *The British Journal of Sports History*, vol.3, no. 1 (1986) pp 18-41.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 25-40.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Mike Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic games, Soccer and Irish identity since 1884* (Dublin, 1999), p. 41.

some role in the construction of national identity, then activities in Donegal in this period would not be deemed sufficient to have helped develop this. The GAA in Donegal could not profess to have played any major role in Ireland's struggle for independence and the Association there was not 'drenched in blood', unlike other counties such as Kerry. McElligott has stated that 'the evolving political situation in Ireland significantly impacted on the Kerry GAA' and during the War of Independence, 'dozens of its local membership took an active and prominent part in the fighting, ensuring that as an organisation the Kerry GAA significantly shaped the conflict.'<sup>10</sup> In Waterford, Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have claimed that 'when the fighting ended and society was once again calm, the impulses that drove Irish nationalism did not dissipate; from the 1920s onwards, they found alternative expression in, amongst other things, the politics of culture and sport.'<sup>11</sup> The case of Cork illustrates how men who had been prominent in the Civil War were later to command major positions of administration in the Irish Free State and the GAA.<sup>12</sup>

As has been shown, Donegal remained on the periphery of the Irish Revolution and the GAA there probably later lacked this raw, emotional 'nationalist' connection, despite the participation of some of its members and an effort in the local press to overstate its involvement in the fight for independence. While it would be naïve to assume participation in sport in Donegal was not influenced by nationalism at the time, without this overt physical military involvement of its members, and any sense that the conflict was being fought in the county, the ideological development of the GAA was probably hindered there to some extent. Donegal was not the only county where the GAA was relatively unaffected by this conflict as the case of Kildare, where the GAA was 'anything but a hotbed of radical nationalism'

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<sup>10</sup> McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom', p. 274.

<sup>11</sup> Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan and Paul Rouse, *The GAA: County by County* (Cork, 2011), p. 389.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81.

illustrates.<sup>13</sup> However, by the early 1930s, the Donegal GAA county board was unique amongst sports organisers in the county itself in that it had managed to, at least partially, develop a ‘county identity’ through its Gaelic football inter-county team, and it is clear that the media, particularly the local press, was one of the tools which the GAA in Donegal used to construct its own version of events to bolster national identity. The *Donegal Democrat*, in particular, in its policy of ignoring local soccer, undoubtedly attempted to portray Gaelic games as the most popular sports in the area.

As John Bale has noted, ‘apart from war, sport is one of the few things that binds people to place simply through ascription.’<sup>14</sup> According to Matthew Potter,

the Gaelic Athletic Association developed a strong, popular, visceral county loyalty, akin to the parallel growth of political and cultural nationalism, which percolated down to all levels of society and saturated sporting, social and public life with an identity that transcended all others, including town, village and parish.<sup>15</sup>

The spread of this ‘identity’ throughout Donegal society in the first fifty years of the GAA has been shown to have been a difficult process and one in which a number of regions were left relatively untouched. Writing in *The GAA: County by County*, Cronin, Duncan and Rouse have illustrated the GAA’s role in forging county identities but have noted that ‘the process by which the GAA shored up county allegiance was by no means smooth or clear cut’ as boundaries and regional differences remained a problem.<sup>16</sup> It was ‘the expansion of inter-county competition’ which helped to add ‘lustre to the county brand and provided the GAA with a financial engine to drive its various activities.’<sup>17</sup> Key innovations such as the organisation of the National League in the 1920s and the revamping of the All-Ireland

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<sup>13</sup> Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: County by County*, p.189.

<sup>14</sup> John Bale, *Sports Geography* (London, 1989), p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew Potter, ““Geographical Loyalty”? Counties, Palatinates, Boroughs and Ridings’ in *History Ireland*, vol. 20, no. 5 (2012), pp 24-7, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: County by County*, p.6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.



championship towards the end of the twentieth century were fundamental to fostering county loyalties.

Given the cultural boundaries already mentioned in Donegal, it would be incorrect to say that the entire county was united behind the Donegal GAA inter-county Gaelic football, or hurling teams, at any point in the years discussed in this thesis. While the religious make-up in the county contrasted with Mayo and Kerry, and was probably sufficient to ensure that there were sections of Donegal society which remained at a distance from GAA events, within the organisation of the Donegal GAA itself there was a failure to unite. This can be best seen in the controversy surrounding Donegal GAA County Board chairman Seán Ó Caiside's comments prior to the 1933 All-Ireland junior final, regarding the South and West Donegal areas where the players were centred, which he had noted was 'only half the county.'<sup>18</sup> This left members of the Eastern divisional board feeling aggrieved, but internal conflict was not something new, having also been a problem for the organisation of the 1905-7 county board. While, as stated in the concluding chapter, progress had been made in the construction of a 'county identity' through the Donegal team in the late 1920s, as late as 1933 there were still problems in attracting support in all areas throughout the county. Although Donegal's appearance in this national final, as noted in chapter four, undoubtedly raised interest levels and helped to popularise this code, not every area was affected, and some sections of society remained unconcerned. This was evident in the lead up to the semi-final clash with Cork, when it was stated by the manager of the County Donegal Railways at Stranorlar that, having made enquiries 'at all our stations', he found that 'there would be very few travelling, more particularly as there are excursions arranged on this day to Enniskillen.'<sup>19</sup> Certainly there appears to have been more attention given to organising public transport to GAA matches in the south of the county, and the *Donegal Democrat* facilitated

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<sup>18</sup> *Donegal Democrat*, 14 Oct. 1933.

<sup>19</sup> Donegal GAA Archives. Letter from Henry Forbes to Seán Ó Caiside, 9 Aug. 1933. GAA 1/4/1 (6) (2).

this by giving clear accounts of bus and train services available to local, regional and national matches, but again, the failure of the county to unite for sporting purposes is clear.<sup>20</sup>

While the early 1930s have been noted as ‘an era of remarkable expansion for the GAA’, the organisation’s development in Donegal did not run parallel to more centralised developments.<sup>21</sup> However, it must be stated that by 1934, the Donegal GAA county board, with its inter-county Gaelic football team and parish set-up, and its league and championship structures, had produced a form of an ‘identifiable’ Donegal. Certainly structures for sport were evident in Donegal to a minor extent in the Victorian era, but there was nothing which gave people a sense of belonging to the county. The GAA could undoubtedly claim to have made more progress in fostering this county identity than the organisers of soccer, rugby or cricket within Donegal society. In his final article in the local press in 1933, Seán Ó Caiside noted ‘a marked improvement in general in the spirit of the games. The team-spirit has visibly improved, and probably to this alone is the success gained by our county teams to be ascribed.’<sup>22</sup> However, he noted that ‘much remains to be done’ and questioned whether more could be achieved ‘in the march towards national freedom.’ This, he felt, would only be gained by devoting more attention to areas such as the Irish language, music, dance and goods manufactured in the country.<sup>23</sup>

As in the case of promoting the Irish language mentioned earlier (and the Ban), it is evident that many players were happy just to play Gaelic games without giving any major thought to what constituted being Irish or nationalist. It is also clear that more traditional thinkers involved in the GAA, such as Ó Caiside, were not satisfied with the state of Irish culture after the gaining of independence. In general, Donegal’s GAA clubs, as well as

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, *DD*, 16 Sept. 1933

<sup>21</sup> Tadhg O hAnnrachain, ‘The Heroic Importance of Sport: The GAA in the 1930s’ in *International Journal of the History of Sport* vol. 25, no. 10 (2008), pp 1326-37, p.1327.

<sup>22</sup> *DD*, 30 Dec. 1933.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*,

engaging in what were deemed to be more ‘nationalist’ sports than their soccer, rugby or cricket counterparts, helped in fostering national identity through their organisation of ceilís although the organisation of Irish language classes was not something which most clubs were concerned with. Again however, whether their members were any more nationalist than the Milford rugby players who sang ‘The Soldier’s Song’ at the end of their annual dance in December 1932 is debateable.<sup>24</sup>

Soccer remained unable to construct any type of county identity within Donegal. The lack of a county-based structure, unlike that offered by the GAA, was undoubtedly a problem, but, as seen in the lack of progress after divisional matches in the late 1920s and the collapse of the County Donegal Cup after only two seasons, initial interest in forging together regional areas was not maintained without regular fixtures and the participation of all clubs in the county. Due largely to soccer organisers’ inability to form a structure for all clubs in Donegal, they could not hope to gain enough interest in all areas and gather sufficient popular support throughout the county. The lack of a sense of regional identification with a top club in the south and south-west was particularly evident, while the parish structure of the GAA generally outweighed anything local soccer organisers could consistently offer. Regional successes, such as Killybegs Emeralds’ Connacht Cup victory in 1934, undoubtedly meant a lot to those in their local area, but there was no widescale attempt to get behind them shown throughout the county.<sup>25</sup> Sporting identification in the north-east was undoubtedly influenced by soccer in Derry and Scotland, as seen in chapter five, while some clubs, such as Kilmacrennan Celtic in their naming of their grounds as Hampden Park, were eager to display the latter connection.<sup>26</sup> Certainly soccer clubs, such as Ramelton FC, who organised an excursion to Portrush at the end of August 1933, were eager to foster a local identity, but

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<sup>24</sup> *Derry People and Tír Conaill News*, 10 Dec. 1932.

<sup>25</sup> *Derry Journal*, 2 March 1934.

<sup>26</sup> *DP and TN*, 29 July 1933.

these teams generally refrained from associating themselves with the Irish language, music and ceilís, possibly because they contained non-Catholic members.<sup>27</sup>

Rugby and cricket remained minority sports, with cricket generally restricted to the east of the county by the late 1920s, while rugby clubs appeared sporadically around the Letterkenny area at the beginning of the following decade. Clearly the lack of involvement of a county cricket, rugby or soccer selection in any national competitions, through a general failure of their national governing bodies to follow the example of the GAA in its national infrastructure, meant that sporting identification with these codes remained localised and regional and failed to be developed into something which all the people of Donegal could get behind. In addition to this, as Mike Cronin has stated, ‘in the Free State, and later in the Republic, the GAA stood as a movement projecting unblemished nationalist credentials.’<sup>28</sup> None of the other sports mentioned above could claim this sense of nationalism, and this undoubtedly had an impact on the public’s identification with them, not just in Donegal, but throughout the country.

In assessing the reasons why GAA clubs developed in certain areas as opposed to others, this thesis provides a unique account of the geography of both association and Gaelic football within a rural Irish county. It challenges the theory that the War of Independence led to a widespread transferral of soccer clubs to Gaelic football in Donegal and illustrates that this decline in soccer was already in place in a number of areas prior to this. An assessment of the GAA in Donegal’s role in the Irish Revolution has also been offered and this is also the first time this has received significant academic attention. Donegal’s relative inactivity meant that GAA matches were generally unperturbed and lacked the disruption in other areas in Ireland where fighting was more widespread. An examination of the role of Donegal’s GAA

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<sup>27</sup> *DP and TN*, 2 Sept. 1933.

<sup>28</sup> Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland*, p. 91.

players, supporters and patrons within Donegal society was also undertaken. Undoubtedly a number of the 1905-7 clubs were formed for political reasons, but GAA activity declined with the loss of support from Seumas MacManus. Subsequently, political groups such as Cumann na nGaedheal also experienced a decline with his absence. Clearly MacManus aimed to use Gaelic games as a vehicle for nationalism, but this did not attract sufficient support amongst enough men with social influence throughout the county to ensure the GAA's survival at the time.

While the 1919 county board did have a political backing, this lessened in the early 1920s and the administrative success of the GAA in Donegal depended largely on a strong network of national school teachers who were dedicated to Gaelic football. Donegal's GAA players were found to have been primarily involved in agricultural work and the majority of administrators were professionals. This contrasted to soccer where the majority of players were based in industrial work, and indicates that GAA players in Donegal were more rural than urban based. Donegal's soccer organisers also differed in that most of these men also came from the industrial category. Other than support received from teachers, the impact of other significant groups with social influence within Donegal society in the GAA was limited. Patronage was also slow in coming and it was not until the 1930s that politicians finally began to get behind the GAA in Donegal, while support given by the clergy was found to have declined after 1907 and depended more on individual interest. It is clear that the GAA in Donegal failed to capture the public's attention until the late 1920s and this support was boosted by the use of the press to attract interest in matches and activities with an increase in support at inter-county matches and county finals evident at this time.

This work has therefore made a valuable contribution to the history of sport in Ireland and Britain and also to Irish history. It has enhanced the understanding of social, cultural, political and economic trends within Donegal and has also contributed to the increasing study

of the social aspects of the GAA. In showing the difficulties in uniting Donegal for sporting purposes, it adds to the work of Bale, Metcalfe, Huggins, Russell and Collins on the geography of sports and it builds upon the recent work of Hunt, McAnallen and McElligott on local dimensions of Gaelic games while providing a comparison for future studies of the national spread of the GAA.<sup>29</sup> Richard McElligott has posed a significant question relating to Donegal in his doctoral thesis, 'Forging a Kingdom: The Establishment and Development of the Gaelic Athletic Association in Kerry, 1884-1924.' In accounting for the success of the GAA in Kerry, he asks if the lack of tradition and key organisers were factors in the failure of the GAA to develop to the same extent in other rural areas of a similar geographical structure such as Galway, Mayo and Donegal.<sup>30</sup> There can be no doubt that organisers of Gaelic football in Donegal did not enjoy the same monopoly on sport as they did in Kerry. Certainly an absence of significant organisers and the early failure to develop a tradition of Gaelic football played a huge part in accounting for Donegal's slow development. A lack of success certainly meant that public interest in Gaelic football remained lower than in Kerry, where success in the 1903 All-Ireland Gaelic football final, played in 1905, boosted levels of interest in this sport.<sup>31</sup> Donegal's first All Ireland championship final victory did not come until 1992 while Kerry had won 30 of these titles by then.<sup>32</sup> Provincially, Donegal did not win

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<sup>29</sup> See Bale, 'Sport and National Identity' and *Sports Geography*; David Russell, 'Sporadic and Curious: The Emergence of Rugby and Soccer Zones in Yorkshire and Lancashire, c. 1860-1914' in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1988), pp 185-205; Alan Metcalfe, 'Football in the Mining Communities of East Northumberland 1882-1914' in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol.5, no.3 (1988), pp 269-91; Mike Huggins 'The Spread of Association Football in North-east England, 1876- 90: The Pattern of Diffusion' in *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol.6, no.3(1989), pp 299-318; Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football* (London, 1998); Tom Hunt, *Sport and Society in Victorian Ireland: The Case of Westmeath* (Cork, 2007); Dónal McAnallen, 'Playing on the Fourth Green State: The Gaelic Athletic Association and the Northern Ireland State, 1921-1968', unpublished Ph.D thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway, 2010 and McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom'.

<sup>30</sup> McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom', p.275.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.154.

<sup>32</sup> 'About the GAA-Rolls of Honour-All Ireland senior football championship' Retrieved from <http://www.gaa.ie/about-the-gaa/gaa-history/rolls-of-honour/> (Accessed 9 Feb. 2012)

an Ulster Senior Gaelic football championship until 1972 and this again highlights the slow development of the GAA in the county.<sup>33</sup>

While problems with transport and finance also affected the GAA in Kerry, it could be argued that in many areas of Donegal the GAA never became as active a force in society and culture as it did there. Regional variations between sports possibly existed in more Irish counties than has been assumed and this requires further study. Localised factors which benefited the diffusion of soccer in Donegal discussed in chapter two were absent from Kerry. Kerry lacked the external influences of areas like Derry and Scotland which were fundamental to the growth of soccer in Donegal, while the south-west county similarly did not have a planted area such as in Donegal where ‘Ulster customs’ were strong. Clearly Donegal had a set of factors which meant that a tradition of Gaelic football was much slower to develop, while soccer benefited. Therefore just how peculiar Donegal was in regard to its sporting preferences in comparison with others counties is unclear. As noted by Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, urban areas such as Longford town and Sligo have enjoyed traditional support for soccer.<sup>34</sup> Although these are towns and the strength of the GAA has often been said to be rural, until a history of soccer in Ireland, similar to *The GAA: County by County* in its geographical spread, is written, it is difficult to assess how unique Donegal was in its choice of sports. As has been shown, support for soccer was not always centred in Donegal’s urban areas. This also illustrates that, as in the case of Donegal, support and participation in both football codes throughout Ireland was fluid and not always restricted to one form of football.

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<sup>33</sup> An t-Ath Seán Ó Gallachóir, *The Raidió na Gaeltachta Book of Donegal GAA Facts* [Third edition] (Letterkenny, 1996), p.20. Donegal’s 2011 Ulster final victory was only their sixth provincial senior Gaelic football championship. In contrast, Kerry has won 74 Munster Gaelic football titles. ‘Munster GAA-Senior Football-Number of Titles’ Retrieved from [http://munster.gaa.ie/history/sf\\_teams/](http://munster.gaa.ie/history/sf_teams/) (accessed 9 Feb. 2012)

<sup>34</sup> Cronin, Duncan and Rouse, *The GAA: County by County*, p.255 and p.348.

This thesis has attempted to locate the study of sport in Donegal within wider debates in sports history and Irish history. It is clear that Donegal society in the late nineteenth century lacked the necessary preconditions for the rapid development of sport. Despite the distinct differences between the east and west of the county, factors associated with the development of sport such as an increasing population, high levels of industry and an efficient education system were absent from Donegal society. The key differences between Donegal and Westmeath appear to have been that the latter county was more prosperous and its gentry were at the centre of sporting activity, while its more central location and more efficient transport system also meant that a number of sports were sustained through strong social networks. In contrast, Donegal, with its scattered rural population, particularly in the west of the county, remained somewhat disjointed in attempts to organise sport and this was not helped by a number of cultural and physical boundaries, which existed largely because of the awkward geology of the county and its sheer size in comparison to the majority of Irish counties.

As chapter two has shown, sports in Donegal could not progress without sufficient financial backing and transport links. This meant that early attempts to run competitive structures lasted only briefly. As Cronin and Higgins have noted, ‘a sport simply existing is not enough for it to be successful, and to become popular.’<sup>35</sup> Tony Collins has recently stated that ‘the reason why Britain developed these sports was it was the first nation to become an industrial, capitalist, economy where people had disposable income.’<sup>36</sup> This was crucial, he believes, as ‘there was the wealth to generate both an interest in sports and also markets for sports.’<sup>37</sup> As has been illustrated throughout, this lack of wealth, which came with an absence of industry in Donegal, was a major factor in the failure of sport to take off there in the late

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<sup>35</sup> Mike Cronin and Roisín Higgins, *Places We Play: Ireland's Sporting Heritage* (Cork, 2011), p.43.

<sup>36</sup> Tony Collins, cited in Jonathan Wright, ‘Britain's Love of Sport’ in *BBC History*, Vol. 13, no. 2 (2012) pp 78-9, p.78.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*,



nineteenth century. Sport was not a huge business in Donegal and was never going to develop from simple pastime to something capable of providing a living for the ordinary working man at this time. Clubs were never going to attract shareholders and businessmen seeking a profitable investment like those in England, and the population simply did not exist for games to develop into forms of mass entertainment.<sup>38</sup>

This thesis set out to explore the reasons for the GAA's slow development in Donegal and to trace its development in relation to the sporting 'revolution'. The early Donegal GAA clubs depended largely upon networks within the GAA in Derry for guidance and matches. An important theme in this thesis has been the diffusion of sport through outside influences. This was particularly evident in the north-east where the spread of both soccer and Gaelic football were initially helped by those in Derry city, where both structures for the administration of soccer and GAA clubs were in existence by the late 1880s. The development of cricket was also quicker in the East Donegal Laggan valley area where connections with Tyrone and the presence of the Finn Valley railway boosted this sport. However, it would be incorrect to assume that a Sporting 'revolution' took place in the Laggan Valley. A comparison with regional areas in Britain has illustrated a number of key factors which were absent or insufficiently developed to foster a sustained growth of sport. Connections with Scotland strengthened the development of soccer and the growth of this sport in Donegal appears to have relied less on those returning from college and the presence of the military as noted by Hunt in his study of Westmeath and more on the movement of seasonal migrants.<sup>39</sup> The brief success of the GAA in Donegal in the 1905-7 period was part of the broader development of cultural nationalism in Ireland at this time and this has also

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<sup>38</sup> 'Sport and the British: The Dawn of Professional Football' Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/sportbrit#playepisode3> (accessed 13 Feb. 2012)

<sup>39</sup> Hunt, *Sport and Society*, pp 171-3.

been noted in Kerry and Westmeath.<sup>40</sup> Its failure in Donegal was largely due to the loss of its key organiser, while other factors such as a lack of co-operation between GAA boards, a failure to attract sufficient public support and poor organisation were also crucial to its decline.

The eventual success of the GAA in Donegal was due to the enthusiasm of small groups of local individuals. It is clear that until the 1920s, Donegal was primarily a soccer county and the GAA was always going to struggle to establish itself after this lengthy delay in organising. That they did so was a credit to its organisers who showed more awareness of the value of the media and the importance of creating divisional league and cup structures than their soccer counterparts. Their ability to put in place an administrative structure, while perhaps not so influential in some areas such as Inishowen, was crucial to the GAA's development and regular meetings were fundamental to this organisation. As Mason has stated in his major publication on soccer, 'clubs, like most other voluntary organisations, depend for their success on people doing things. When they stop, the club stops.'<sup>41</sup> This was as much the case in regard to Donegal's GAA clubs as of soccer clubs in England. The 1920s in Ireland was an era which saw a number of improvements in administration which benefited the GAA. Social engineering was prominent with the movement of Garda Síochána strengthening the GAA in the Free State. National school teachers also placed more emphasis on participating in Gaelic games than soccer and these men had steady jobs with fixed hours and free time. Experience of paperwork also meant they could organise matches effectively and build strong networks and this can be seen in the dominance of teachers at county board level in Donegal in the period from 1919-34. They were also amongst the pillars of society and were much less likely to emigrate, and could use their influence in the classroom and local society to promote Gaelic games (although a lack of school facilities such as playing

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<sup>40</sup> McElligott, 'Forging a Kingdom' pp 273-4 and Hunt, *Sport and Society*, pp 193-6.

<sup>41</sup> Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915* (Brighton, 1980), p.21.

fields was a problem). Hurling in particular suffered from a lack of equipment and Gaelic football was much easier to demonstrate and learn, which meant that the diffusion of the former sport suffered.

By the early 1930s there were clear boundaries between Gaelic football and soccer zones and despite the presence of the Ban and a smear campaign in the local press, the GAA was unsuccessful in the drive to eradicate soccer from Donegal society. At this time it was clear that the south and south-west of Donegal was where the strength of Gaelic football lay and this code was rather weak further north. Movement between codes in parts of Donegal such as the east and north-west was more fluid and both forms of football were played there. Gaelic football was strengthened through the organisation of parish leagues and local competitions and the arranging of divisional structures improved administration. South and South-west Donegal continued to dominate Gaelic football for the rest of the twentieth century and into the new millennium. This can be seen in the fact that by 2012, eleven out of seventeen clubs which have won the Donegal Senior Gaelic football club championship were from the south and south-west areas. Only five clubs from East Donegal have won it, and only one from the north-west has lifted the trophy. Inishowen still awaits its first winning club.<sup>42</sup> While Donegal's All-Ireland victory in 1992 gave the county a massive boost, success at a national level has been limited, although the inter-county team is now enjoying a revival with Jim McGuinness as manager.<sup>43</sup>

The popularity of soccer in Donegal has certainly diminished interest in the GAA to some extent. In addition to a nationally comparative study of the rivalry between Gaelic

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<sup>42</sup> Ó Gallcháir, *The Raidió na Gaeltachta Book of Donegal GAA Facts*, pp 60-1. In 2012, Glenswilly became the seventeenth Donegal GAA club to win the Dr Maguire cup.

<sup>43</sup> In 1992 fourteen of Donegal's starting fifteen in the final against Dublin were from the south and south-west. Donegal failed to add to their fifth Ulster Senior Gaelic football championship, won in 1992, until their 2011 triumph over Derry and in 2012 they defeated Down in the Ulster final. In September 2012 they won their second All-Ireland senior Gaelic football championship. The county was also successful in the National League final of 2007.

football and soccer administrators, more research needs to be undertaken on the links between seasonal migration and the importation of soccer as an alternative driver of sporting diffusion. While it is difficult to be precise on the advent of scouting by British clubs in Ireland, (as noted in chapter five), this cross-channel involvement has been going on since the early part of the twentieth century in Donegal and links with Scotland undoubtedly provided opportunities for talented players to break into professional soccer. More recently, Donegal's strong tradition of soccer can also be seen in the cases of English Premier League players Shay Given, Seamus Coleman and, a little further back, Gary Doherty and in Scotland, Glasgow Celtic's Packie Bonner.<sup>44</sup> All these players hail from strong soccer areas- Bonner from the West Donegal fishing village of Burtonport, Given from the border town of Lifford, Doherty from Carndonagh (Inishowen) and Coleman from Killybegs. While this trend requires further investigation, it seems that there is no other peripheral Irish county which has produced this number of professional soccer players who have played at a top level in Britain in recent times.<sup>45</sup> Due to his recent success as manager of the Donegal Gaelic football inter-county team, Jim McGuinness has now secured a contract with Glasgow Celtic to work as a Sports Performance consultant, illustrating both the lure of professional football and Donegal's strong cultural connections with Scotland, although he will continue to manage and coach Donegal.<sup>46</sup> As seen in the 1930s, this prospect of a career in professional soccer

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<sup>44</sup> 'Football Association of Ireland-Ireland's International Players' Retrieved from <http://www.fai.ie/international/senior-men/irelands-international-players.html> (Accessed 3 Dec. 2012) As of 15 Nov. 2012 Given was the Republic of Ireland's record caps holder with 125 caps. Doherty was born in Carndonagh in 1980 and played 30 times for his country between 2000 and 2005. Coleman has already played nine times at international level while Bonner finished his career in 1996 with 80 international appearances. Born in 1986, Ramelton's Conrad Logan is now part of Leicester City's first team squad and has appeared in goal a number of times for his club. Although recently released, in 2010 Manchester United signed then 16 year old goalkeeper Joe Coll who is a native of Gortahork in the north-west. Shay Given has stated that experience of ball handling and punching gained while playing Gaelic football as a teenager undoubtedly benefited his development as a goalkeeper. See Liam Porter, 'Donegal's regular player at Croke Park' in *Dún na nGall GAA Yearbook 2008* (Donegal, 2008), pp 58-61, p.59.

<sup>45</sup> Lisa Gray, 'Shay Given Interested in Celtic Switch' Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/premier-league/shay-given-interested-in-celtic-switch-2288798.html> (Accessed 9 Feb. 2012) Bonner and Given both joined Glasgow Celtic as teenagers.

<sup>46</sup> 'Donegal GAA boss Jim McGuinness Accepts Celtic Role' Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/northern-ireland/20254492> [Accessed 4 Dec. 2012]

has undoubtedly influenced many young Donegal players to pursue a career in association rather than Gaelic football and this has continued to the present day.<sup>47</sup> While speculative, this pattern may previously have had a negative effect on the development of Gaelic football in the county with levels of interest in both codes varying and offers another understanding of why, in GAA terms, through to the 1920s, Donegal slept.

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<sup>47</sup> See, for example, the case of Declan Boyle of Killybegs. In 1993, 19 year old Boyle, arguably one of the most gifted dual footballers Donegal has ever produced, made his debut for Donegal in the Ulster Senior Gaelic football championship against Armagh. He later joined Glasgow Celtic and, having failed to obtain a regular first team place, returned to play professionally in the League of Ireland and Irish League.

## Appendices

Appendix 1: Number of matches involving Donegal GAA clubs/teams recorded in the local and national press, 1888-92.

Year	Name	Number of hurling matches recorded	Number of G.Football matches recorded
<b>1888</b>	Burt Hibernians	3	0
	Cahir O's Buncrana	1 unspecified	0
<b>1889</b>	Burt Hibernians	2	0
	Portlough Harps	1	0
	Killea Hibernians	3	3
	Cahir O's	7	6
	Bundoran Irish Hearts	0	1
	Finner	0	1
<b>1890</b>	Burt Hibernians	4	3
	Cahir O's	3	2
	Portlough Harps	2	2
	Killea Hibernians	3	3
	Buncrana Emmets	1	2
	Newtowncunningham Harps	4	3
<b>1891</b>	Burt Hibernians	2	0
	Newtowncunningham Harps	2	0
	The Joys	0	1
	Green Volunteers	0	1
	Moville Harps	0	1
	Ballynelly Pioneers	0	1
<b>1892</b>	Burt Hibernians	2	0
	Newtowncunningham Harps	1	0

Sources: *Sport*, *DV*, *DI* and *DJ* 1888-92. Abandoned matches have also been included.

## Appendix 2

Gaelic football teams participating in Donegal, 1919-34.

Year	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
South	6	5	4	4	2	8	4	4	4	4	4
West	3	0	4	4	4	3	2	2	2	1	2
East	7	7	13	7	8	8	7	12	7	11	7
South-west	1	0	3	4	3	5	3	4	5	4	3
Inishowen	1	5	1	1	2	6	0	0	0	0	2
Overall Total	18	17	25	20	19	30	16	22	18	20	18

Year	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934
South	7	8	12	12	10
West	4	2	3	9	14
East	16	20	19	16	25
South-west	10	14	10	17	17
Inishowen	2	3	1	1	1
Overall Total	39	47	45	55	67

Sources: *DJ, DV, DI, DP and DN, DP and TN, DPP* 1919-34.

### Appendix 3

Gaelic football teams in South Donegal, 1919-34. Sources: As appendix 2.

Club	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
Aodh Ruadh, Ballyshannon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓
Assaroe	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—	—	—
Ballintra Emeralds	✓	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—	—	—
Belleek (Fermanagh)	—	✓	—	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cashelard	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	✓
Corlea(Fermanagh)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—
Drimarone	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eire Óg	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—	—	—
Finner Camp	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	✓	✓	—	—
Four Masters, Donegal Town	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Killymard	—	✓	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—	—
Kinlough (Leitrim)	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mountcharles	—	—	—	✓	—	✓	✓	—	✓	—	—
St Patrick's, Bundoran	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	✓	✓
Pettigo	—	—	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓
Tanatallon(Mountcharles)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—
Young Tír Conaills	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>

Club	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934
Aodh Ruadh, Ballyshannon	✓	✓	✓	✓**	✓**
Ballintra	—	✓	✓	—	—
Barnes	✓	—	—	—	—
Cashelard	✓	✓	✓	✓*	✓
Clyhore(Fermanagh)	—	—	—	✓*	—
Corlea(Fermanagh)	—	—	—	✓*	✓*
Croagh	—	—	—	✓	—
Donegal Town	✓	✓	✓	✓**	✓
Drimarone	—	—	—	✓	—
Driminin	—	—	✓	—	—
Drumbar	—	✓	—	—	—
Drumholm, Ballintra	—	✓	—	—	—
Frosses	—	—	✓	—	—
Finner Camp	✓	—	—	—	—



Killymard	—	—	√	√	√
Lough Eske	—	—	√	—	—
Meenagran	—	—	√	—	—
Mountcharles	√	—	√	—	—
Star of the Sea,Bundoran	√	√	√	√	√
St Ernan's, Ballintra	—	—	—	—	√
St Patrick's, Bundoran	—	—	—	—	—
Pettigo	—	—	—	√	√*
Tanatallon(Mountcharles)	—	√	—	√*	√
Townawilly	—	—	√	√*	√*
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>

\*Denotes junior team \*\* Denotes junior and senior team.Sources: As appendix 2.

## Appendix 4

Gaelic football teams in East Donegal, 1919-34.

Club	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
Belalt(Tyrone)	—	√*	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ballybofey Kickhams	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	—
Carrigans	—	—	—	—	—	√	—	√	√	—	—
Carrigart	—	—	—	—	√	√	√	√	—	—	—
Castlefin Emmets	—	—	√	√	—	—	—	√	—	—	—
Churchill	—	—	—	—	—	√	—	—	—	—	—
Clonleigh	—	—	—	—	—	√	—	√	—	—	—
Con Colbert's,Castlefin	√	√*	√	—	√	—	—	—	—	—	—
Convoy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	√
Creeshlough	√	—	—	—	√	√	—	√	—	—	—
Crossroads(Ballybofey)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	—
Downings	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Éire Óg, Ballybofey	—	√*	√	—	—	—	√	√	√	—	—
Erin's Hope (Ballybofey & Stranorlar Utd.)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	√
Geraldines, Letterkenny	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	√	√	—	—
Goland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	—
Kevin Barry's, Stranorlar	—	√*	√	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	√
Lifford	—	—	—	—	√	√	—	—	—	—	—
Lischooley	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	—
Milford	—	—	—	—	√	√	—	—	—	—	—
Letterkenny Faugh a Ballaghs	√	√	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Letterkenny Rovers	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	√	√	—	—
O'Toole's, Raphoe	—	—	√	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rabstown (Tyrone)	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Raphoe	—	—	—	—	√	—	√	√	—	√	√
Rathmullan Rovers	—	—	—	—	—	√	—	—	—	—	—
Red Hugh's,Killygordon	√	√**	√	—	—	—	—	—	√	√	√
Red Hugh's, Letterkenny	—	—	—	—	√	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sarsfields, Stranorlar	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	√	—	√	—
St Eunan's, Letterkenny	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	√	—
St Eunan's College, Letterkenny	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
St Mary's, Castlefin	—	—	√	√	—	—	—	√	√	√	√
St Pat's, Derry	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	—	—	—
Swilly Rovers, Churchill	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Mental Hospital, Letterkenny	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	—	—	—	√
Tír Conaill Harps, Murlog	—	—	√	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Trusk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	—

William Pearse's,Clady (Tyrone)	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Young McCartan's, Ballybofey	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Young McCarron's, Ballybofey	—	—	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>

<b>Club</b>	<b>1930</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1932</b>	<b>1933</b>	<b>1934</b>
Ballinamore	—	—	—	—	✓
Ballyheerin	✓	—	✓	✓	✓
Ballyhuirke	—	—	✓	✓	—
Ballywhoriskey	—	—	✓	—	—
Carrigart	✓	—	—	—	—
Carry Rovers	—	—	✓	—	—
Cashel (Fanad)	—	—	—	✓	—
Churchill	—	✓	—	—	—
Cloghan	✓	—	✓	✓	✓*
Cloghan Invincibles	—	—	—	—	✓*
Convoy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Crossroads(Ballybofey)	—	—	—	—	✓
Crossroad Rangers (Fanad)	—	—	✓	—	—
Downings	✓	—	—	—	—
Erin's Hope (Ballybofey & Stranorlar Utd.)	✓	✓	✓	✓	—
Fanad Creeve Roes	—	✓	✓	✓	✓
Finn Rovers(Ballybofey)	—	—	—	—	✓
Fintown	✓	—	—	✓	✓*
Gartan	—	✓	—	—	✓
Glenfin Rangers	—	—	—	—	✓*
Glenswilly	✓	✓	—	—	—
Glendoan	—	—	—	✓	—
Glenvar	—	—	—	✓	—
Goland	—	—	✓	—	—
Gortnatra	—	—	—	✓	—
Kilmacrennan	—	—	✓	—	—
Kingarrow	—	—	—	—	✓
Knock Sarsfields	—	—	—	—	✓
Lennon Swifts	—	✓	—	—	—
Lifford	—	✓	—	—	—
Main Street, Ballybofey	—	—	—	—	✓
Milford	✓	✓	✓	—	✓
Murlog	—	✓	—	—	—

Meenlaharry	—	—	—	—	√
Letterkenny Rovers	—	—	—	—	√*
Porthall	—	√	√	√	√
Portsalon Gaels	√	—	—	—	—
Raphoe	√	√	√	√	√*
Red Hugh's, Killygordon	√	√	—	—	√
Rossgier	—	√	—	—	—
St Eunan's, Letterkenny	√	√	√**	√	√
St Eunan's College, Letterkenny	√	√	√	—	—
St Mary's, Castlefin	√	√	√	—	√
St Mary's, Rossgier	√	√	—	—	√
St Pat's, Derry	—	—	—	—	—
Swilly Rovers, Churchill	—	√	√	√	√
The Pat's, Letterkenny	—	√	√	—	—
Toame	—	—	—	√	—
42nd Street, Ballybofey	—	—	—	—	√
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>25</b>

Sources: As appendices 2 and 3.

## Appendix 5

Gaelic football teams in West Donegal, 1919-34.

Club	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
Annagry	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burtonport	√	—	—	—	√	—	—	—	—	—	—
Derrybeg Emmets	—	—	√	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dunfanaghy	—	—	—	—	√	√	√	—	—	—	—
Dungloe	—	—	—	—	—	√	√	√	√	√	√
Falcarragh	—	—	√	√	—	—	—	—	√	—	√
Fontenoy's, Rosses	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gortahork	√	—	—	—	√	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gweedore	—	—	√	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kincasslagh Rovers	—	—	√	√	—	√	—	—	—	—	—
Maghery	—	—	—	—	√	—	—	√	—	—	—
Maramelain	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mullaghduff	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rannafast	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rosses Rovers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

Club	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934
Annagry	√*	—	—	√*	—
Ballinacarrick	—	—	—	—	√*
Doochary	—	—	—	—	√*
Dooey	—	—	—	—	√
Dunfanaghy	—	—	—	√*	—
Dungloe	√	√	√	√**	√*
Falcarragh	√	—	√	√	√*
Gweebarra	—	—	—	—	√*
Gweedore	√	√	√	√*	√*
Kincasslagh Rovers	—	—	—	√	—
Maas	—	—	—	—	√
Maramelain	—	—	—	√*	√*
Meendernasole Rovers	—	—	—	—	√*
Meenmore	—	—	—	—	√
Mullaghduff	—	—	—	√*	—
Rannafast	—	—	—	√*	—
Roddy's Rovers	—	—	—	—	√*
Rosses Celtic	—	—	—	—	√*

Rosses Rovers	—	—	—	—	v*
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>

\*Despite their north-western location, Creeslough, Downings and Carrigart were grouped in the eastern area by the county board for Gaelic football purposes and have been included in the eastern table.

Sources: As appendices 2, 3 and 4.

## Appendix 6

GAA teams in South-west Donegal, 1919-34.

Club	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
Ardara	—	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bruckless	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—
Carrick	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—	—	—
Dunkineely	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	✓	—
Glenties	—	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—
Glenties Utd.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓
Kilcar	—	—	—	✓	—	✓	✓	—	✓	—	—
Killaghtee	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓
Killybegs	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	✓	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>

Club	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934
Ardara	✓	✓**	✓	✓**	✓**
Ballydhu	✓	✓	—	—	—
Bruckless	—	✓	✓	✓	—
Carrick	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cashel	—	—	—	—	✓
Commons	—	—	✓	✓	✓
Croagh	—	✓	✓	✓	—
Downstrands	—	✓	—	—	—
Dunkineely	—	—	✓	✓	✓
Fintown	✓	—	—	—	✓*
Fintra	—	✓	—	✓	✓
Glencolumbkille	—	—	—	✓	✓**
Glenties	—	—	—	—	—
Glenties Utd.	✓	✓	✓*	✓	—
Kilcar	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Killaghtee	—	—	—	✓*	✓*
Killybegs	—	—	—	—	—
Killybegs Niall Mors	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maghera	—	—	✓	—	—
Malinmore	✓	✓	—	—	—
Meenacross	✓	✓	—	✓	✓
Meenaneary	—	—	—	✓	✓
Straleel	✓	✓	—	✓	✓

St John's Point	—	—	—	√	√*
Teelin	—	—	—	—	√
Tullycleave	—	√	—	—	—
Owentocker (Glenties)	—	—	—	√*	√
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>

Sources: As appendices 2, 3, 4 and 5.



## Appendix 7

GAA teams in Inishowen, 1919-34.

Club	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
Burnfoot Kevin Barry's	—	—	—	—	—	√	—	—	—	—	—
Burt	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	√
Burt Éire Óg	—	—	—	—	—	√	—	—	—	—	
Burt Hibernians	—	—	—	—	—		—	—	—	—	√
Cahir O's, Buncrana	√	√	—	√	√	√	—	—	—	—	—
Carndonagh	—	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Clonmany	—	—	—	—	√	—	—	—	—	—	—
Maginns	—	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Newtowncunningham	—	√	—	—	—	√	—	—	—	—	—
St Mary's, Clonmany	—	—	—	—	—	√	—	—	—	—	—
St Mura's, Fahan	—	—	√	—	—	√	—	—	—	—	—
St Patrick's, Buncrana	—	√	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

Club	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934
Burnfoot Kevin Barry's	—	—	—	—	—
Burt	√	√	—	√	—
Inch	—	√	—	—	—
Umrícam	—	—	√	—	√
United Services, Buncrana	√	√	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

Sources: As appendices 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

## Appendix 8

Hurling teams in Donegal, 1919-34.

Club	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
Aodh Ruadh, Ballyshannon	✓	—	—	—	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	✓	✓
Ballybofey	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—
Ballyshannon Harps	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—
Buncrana Military Garrison	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—
Bundoran	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓
Burt	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓
Burt Hibernians	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—
Cahir Os, Buncrana	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	—
Carndonagh Cuchulainns	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	—	—	—
Cashelard	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—	—	—
Cloneen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—
Derry	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—
Éire Óg, Moville	—	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Geraldines	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	—	—
Kevin Barry's, Quigley's Point	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—
Kinlough (Leitrim)	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—
Inch Emeralds	—	—	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	—	—	✓
Raphoe	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—
Red Hugh's, Moville	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓
St Comgall's, Carrowmore	—	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	—	✓	—	—
St Eunan's, Letterkenny	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—
St Finian's, Moville	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	✓	✓
St Mura's, Fahan	—	—	✓	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Letterkenny	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	✓	—	✓
Letterkenny Mental Hospital	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—
Lifford	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—	✓	—	—	—
Manorhamilton	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	✓	—	—	—
National Army, Finner	—	—	—	—	✓	—	✓	✓	✓	—	—
National Army, Finner B team	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—	—
Newtowncunningham Red Hughs	—	✓	✓	—	—	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stranorlar	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	✓	—

Young Irelands(Ballyshannon)	—	—	—	—	—	—	√	√	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>

<b>Club</b>	<b>1930</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1932</b>	<b>1933</b>	<b>1934</b>
Aodh Ruadh, Ballyshannon	√	√	√	√	√
Bundoran	—	—	√	—	—
Burt	√	√		√	√
Carndonagh Cuchulainns	—	—	—	√	√**
Carndonagh Cuchulainns B team	—	—	—	√	—
Four Masters,Donegal Town	—	—	—	—	√*
Inch Emeralds	√	√		√	√
St Comgall's, Carrowmore	—	—	—	√	√
St Eunan's, Letterkenny	√	√		√	√**
St Eunan's College, Letterkenny	—	—	—	—	√
St Finian's, Moville	—	—	—	—	—
St Mary's, Buncrana	—	—	—	√	√*
Red Hugh's, Moville	—	—	—	—	√*
Milford	—	√	—	—	—
United Services, Buncrana	√	—	—	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>

Sources: As appendices 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.

## Appendix 9

Number of association football clubs by area, 1905-14.

Areas	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914
South-west Donegal	2	2	3	0	3	1	3	4	2	4
South Donegal	9	6	3	3	5	4	7	2	9	3
West/North-west	4	0	2	0	5	3	3	4	7	6
East/North-east Donegal	14	11	3	5	9	11	13	11	11	5
Inishowen	3	0	2	0	5	4	3	1	0	0
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>18</b>

Sources: *DJ, DV, DI, DP and DN*, 1905-14.

## Appendix 10

Number of association football clubs by area, 1915-24.

<b>Areas</b>	<b>1915</b>	<b>1916</b>	<b>1917</b>	<b>1918</b>	<b>1919</b>	<b>1920</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1922</b>	<b>1923</b>	<b>1924</b>
South-west Donegal	5	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Donegal	2	7	5	2	0	0	2	0	0	0
West/North-west	1	11	5	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
East/North-east Donegal	3	2	11	7	13	10	13	0	9	0
Inishowen	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	9	0
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>0</b>

Sources: As Appendix 9, 1915-24 and also *DD*, 1919-24.

## Appendix 11

Association football teams by area, 1925-34.

<b>Areas</b>	<b>1925</b>	<b>1926</b>	<b>1927</b>	<b>1928</b>	<b>1929</b>	<b>1930</b>	<b>1931</b>	<b>1932</b>	<b>1933</b>	<b>1934</b>
South-west Donegal	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	3	1
South Donegal	2	5	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2
West/North-west	0	4	8	3	2	2	6	6	4	2
East/North-east Donegal	0	19	13	7	14	34	36	50	56	66
Inishowen	9	17	19	13	5	3	17	36	36	32
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>103</b>

Sources: As appendix 10, 1925-34 and also *DPP*, 1931-4.

## Appendix 12

### Political background of Competitive GAA clubs, 1905-7.

Name	Date founded	Origins of club name	Founder(s)	Political Involvement
Lámh Dearth, Mountcharles	c.Feb. 1905	Red Hand', motto of O'Neill clan	Seumas MacManus	Cumann na nGaedheal
Ethna Carberry's, Croagh	1905	Wife of Seumas MacManus;Gaelic League activist	John McGrath	Cumann na nGaedheal
Ardaghey Old Celts	1905	Irish allegiance	James Maguire	Unknown
Thomas Davis, Dunkineely	14 May 1905	Nineteenth century Irish political figure	Seamus McHugh	Cumann na nGaedheal
Balldearth, Donegal town	20 Oct. 1905	Birthmark peculiar to O'Donnell clan	P.M. Gallagher, R.C. Bonner	Gaelic League
Clann Conaill, Brackey	c. Aug. 1905	Family of son of Irish High King, Conall Gulban	Charles McGill	Unknown
Inver	c. Feb. 1906	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Killybegs	c. April 1906	Unspecified	Joseph Rowan, John O'Friel	Unknown
Sinn Féin, Bundoran	c. Oct. 1906	Political organisation	Edward Daly	Gaelic League
Rory Ógs, Ballybofey	14 May 1906	1st Earl of Tyrconnell, Rory O'Donnell	Unknown	Unknown
Burt Hibernians	5 Feb. 1888	Irish allegiance	Unknown but GAA introduced to parish by Derry club St Patrick's	Unknown
Newtowncunningham Harps	c. 1889, refounded 1905	Irish allegiance	Unknown 1889 but 1905 founded by Daniel McConville	Unknown
Lámh Dearth, Letterkenny	18 Sept. 1905	Red Hand', motto of O'Neill clan	James Peoples	Irish National Federation, United Irish League
St Mura's, Fahan	c.1899	Irish saint	Unknown	Unknown
Gweedore Old Celts	5 Nov. 1905	Irish allegiance	Neil J. Ferry	Unknown
St Columba's, Churchill	1906	Irish saint	Unknown	Unknown
Creelough	9 Nov. 1905	Unspecified	Michael Harkin, Patrick McCarry	Ancient Order of Hibernians
Inch Emeralds	1906	Irish allegiance	Unknown	Unknown

Source: *DJ, DP and DN, DI and DV*, 1905-7.

## Appendix 13

Political background of non-competitive GAA clubs, 1905-7.

Name	Date Founded	Origins of club name	Founders	Political Involvement
Doorin Young Irelanders	c. July 1905	Nineteenth century Irish political movement	Unknown	Unknown
Naomh Conaill, Kilraine	28 July. 1905	Irish saint	Neal McNelis, D. McDwyer	Cumann na nGaedheal
True Gaels, Meenabradden	22 Oct. 1905	Irish allegiance	Unknown	Cumann na nGaedheal
Tír Conaill, Fintown	c. Nov. 1905	Kingdom formerly belonging to Conall Gulban	Rev. Charles Kennedy	Unknown
Glenfin	c. Oct. 1905	Unspecified	Rev. Burns	Gaelic League & AOH
Colmcille club, Lettermore	c.1905	Irish saint	Unknown	Unknown
Killygordon	6 Jan. 1906	Unspecified	P.A. Maguire, James McGranaghan	Unknown
Ardara	15 April. 1906	Unspecified	P.Molloy	Unknown
Glenswilly	Unknown	Unspecified	Unknown	Unknown
Drumkeelin	Unknown	Unspecified	Unknown	Unknown
Frosses	Unknown	Unspecified	Unknown	Unknown

Source: As appendix 12.



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